

# European Rural Youth Summit



## THE EUROPEAN RURAL YOUTH SUMMIT FROM RURAL TO PLURAL



## FROM RURAL TO PLURAL Policy recommendation Paper on building a European Rural Youth Ecosystem

(including scaling up the European Youth Village - a tool for developing the European Rural Youth Ecosystem)

## The VISION

"We dream of a countryside where every young person can shine! We want you to have all the tools and chances you need, in a world that listens to your voice. Together, let's make rural Europe a cool, caring, and creative space for all!"

## The MISSION

Become a strategic program aiming to develop the rural youth ecosystem based on six interlinked components putting the rural young people needs in the center.

The six components are: 1) Youth vision, 2) Human resources, 3) Youth work, information and counselling, 4) Youth structures, 5) Youth infrastructure, and 6) Youth funding.

## The AIM

"Our big goal is simple: make every village a place where young people can learn, grow, lead, and be happy!"

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# FROM RURAL TO PLURAL - a Policy recommendation Paper on building the European Rural Youth Ecosystem

## CONTEXT

In the southern-east of Europe, amid the picturesque landscapes and idyllic villages in Dorobanț - Aroneanu, Iasi county, the "European Rural Youth Summit" convened **107 dynamic young individuals and youth workers** from **18 diverse European nations**: Albania, Armenia, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, Malta, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Ukraine.

The summit, held with the **aim of cultivating a strategic framework for a thriving European rural ecosystem**, stands as a legacy to the untapped potential, innovation, and resilience residing within the continent's rural youth.

As urbanization continues to exert pressure on rural areas, this policy paper endeavors to harness the collective wisdom of these young leaders and translate their aspirations into actionable policies. Through an exploration of the summit's key insights, we propose a comprehensive policy framework that not only addresses the unique challenges faced by rural communities but also fosters an environment where Europe's rural youth can flourish, contributing decisively to the continent's sustainable future, having core values as equity and inclusion, fight for climate change, digital transformation and participation of young people, and shaping the possibility to **Scale the European Youth Village program at European level**, as an important instrument for developing **the Rural Youth Ecosystem** (Youth vision, Human resources, Youth work, information and counseling, Youth structures, Youth infrastructure, and Youth funding).

# We, the participants in the 1st European Rural Youth Summit (6-8.09.2023),

## CONSIDERING

- Resolution CM/Res(2020)2 on the Council of Europe youth sector strategy 2030<sup>1</sup>;
- Resolution of the Council of the European Union and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on a framework for European Cooperation in the youth field: The European Union Youth Strategy 2019–2027 (2018/C 456/01)<sup>2</sup>;
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)7 of the Committee of Ministers to member states regarding young people's access to rights<sup>3</sup>
- Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on raising opportunities for young people in rural and remote areas (2020/C 193/03)<sup>4</sup>;
- Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on the access of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods to social rights (CM/Rec(2015)3) – Council of Europe<sup>5</sup>;
- Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on the Framework for establishing a European Youth Work Agenda (2020/C 415/01)<sup>6</sup>;
- Council Conclusions on the role of youth work in supporting young people's development of essential life skills that facilitate their successful transition to adulthood, active citizenship and working life (2017/C 189/06)<sup>7</sup>;
- European Charter on Local Youth work (EGL)<sup>8</sup>;
- Regulation (EU) 2021/241 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 February 2021 establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility<sup>9</sup>;
- European Parliament resolution of 13 December 2022 on a long-term vision for the EU's rural areas – Towards stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040 (2021/2254(INI))<sup>10</sup>;
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on youth work<sup>11</sup>;
- Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on education and training of youth workers 2019/C 412/03<sup>12</sup>;

<sup>1</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/0900001680998935>

<sup>2</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A42018Y1218%2801%29>

<sup>3</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/1680702b6e>

<sup>4</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020XG0609%2801%29>

<sup>5</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/168066671e>

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.bonn-](https://www.bonn-process.net/downloads/publications/28/Resolutions_Council_uriserv_OJ_C_ENG_EN_TXT.pdf?version=e8c9e4c87451bec342dcdca8a5ef9d28)

[process.net/downloads/publications/28/Resolutions\\_Council\\_uriserv\\_OJ\\_C\\_ENG\\_EN\\_TXT.pdf?version=e8c9e4c87451bec342dcdca8a5ef9d28](https://www.bonn-process.net/downloads/publications/28/Resolutions_Council_uriserv_OJ_C_ENG_EN_TXT.pdf?version=e8c9e4c87451bec342dcdca8a5ef9d28)

<sup>7</sup> [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52017XG0615\(01\)&from=DE](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52017XG0615(01)&from=DE)

<sup>8</sup> <https://europegoeslocal.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/20210309-egl-charter.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32021R0241>

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0436\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0436_EN.html)

<sup>11</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/1680717e78>

<sup>12</sup> [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?toc=OJ%3AC%3A2019%3A412%3AFULL&uri=uriserv%3A0J.C\\_.2019.412.01.0012.01.ENG](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?toc=OJ%3AC%3A2019%3A412%3AFULL&uri=uriserv%3A0J.C_.2019.412.01.0012.01.ENG)

- Recommendation 128 (2003) on the revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life<sup>13</sup>;
- Recommendation Rec(2006)14 on citizenship and participation of young people in public life<sup>14</sup>;
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7 on the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education<sup>15</sup>;
- Romanian White Charter of Rural Youth<sup>16</sup>;

## fYOUTure of Youth EcoSystem

Having regard to the Resolution on the fYOUTure of Youth EcoSystem<sup>17</sup>, whereas The Youth Ecosystem, which is centred on the young person, includes:

- Youth VISION (legislation, policies, strategies, work plans, programs, coordination),
- HUMAN RESOURCES for youth (youth workers, volunteers and paid personnel, managers, facilitators, experts, policy makers),
- Youth WORK, youth INFORMATION, COUNSELING and OTHER SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES (including projects and trainings to increase the participation of the young people in community life and to develop youth organizations capacity building),
- Youth STRUCTURES (youth NGOs, authorities and public institutions, resource centres, youth councils, consultative and deliberative bodies, clubs, informal groups, National Youth Councils, youth movements),
- Youth INFRASTRUCTURE (youth centres, friendly spaces to engage young people in a comfortable manner (urban or rural / physical, mobile or virtual)
- Youth FUNDING (public, private, crowdfunding / based on competition, direct funding or participatory budget)

## STRESSING THAT

Young people in rural areas confront a plethora of challenges. Inadequate infrastructure curtails their access to essential services, such as education and medical facilities. Safety concerns arise from a prevalent mistrust in local authorities, including the police, who sometimes overlook issues like domestic violence. Discrimination against groups like the Roma and LGBTQ+ intensifies these problems. The dearth of professionals, notably in mental health, coupled with problems like cyberbullying, further affects the youth. European Union policies and legislation often fail to address these challenges adequately, as they typically lack customization for rural contexts.

Youth work in these areas presents its own set of hurdles. Transportation difficulties make it arduous for youth workers, particularly those from urban areas, to access rural regions. Consequently, a cultural gap emerges between urban-origin workers and rural youth, leading to misunderstandings and migration of rural youth seeking better opportunities. Many youth workers, grappling with multiple roles, frequently work without pay, leading to demotivation. Furthermore, financial

<sup>13</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/168071b4d6>

<sup>14</sup> [https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47261806/CoE\\_Rec2006\\_14.pdf/620ff7af-2fc2-45f2-a7a6-b2dcd69f435d](https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47261806/CoE_Rec2006_14.pdf/620ff7af-2fc2-45f2-a7a6-b2dcd69f435d)

<sup>15</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/16803034e5>

<sup>16</sup> <https://europeanoyouthvillage.eu/carta-alba/>

<sup>17</sup> [https://www.suntsolidar.eu/library/fYOUTure%20of%20YOUTH/Rezolution/Resolution\\_after\\_voting.pdf](https://www.suntsolidar.eu/library/fYOUTure%20of%20YOUTH/Rezolution/Resolution_after_voting.pdf)



restrictions sometimes force them to take on additional jobs, affecting their professional relationships. Their roles, often underestimated, create tensions with administrative bodies. Compounding these challenges are the pressures on their mental health, lack of networking structures, and trust issues with stakeholders.

Rural youngsters face substantial barriers in accessing quality youth work, information, and counselling. Limited resources, both monetary and human, hinder essential service delivery. Additionally, the unavailability of crucial information, complex bureaucratic systems, and the absence of youth centers and efficient public transportation are detrimental. These issues are more acute for marginalized groups, who often face language barriers, poverty, and discrimination. Largely, youngsters remain uninformed about their rights due to societal pressures, intergenerational communication gaps, and an absence of support, both peer and institutional.

Communication and cooperation between rural youth and authorities present myriad challenges. In certain countries, younger leaders experience distrust and bureaucratic demotivation, while in others, training and resources for liaising with authorities are scarce. Sustainability issues plague rural youth NGOs, coupled with capacity challenges like insufficient youth workers and transportation problems. Marginalized groups endure additional hurdles, necessitating an encompassing solution that involves improved training, trust-building, and a refined framework for youth participation.

Despite the existence of some youth centers, many function at inconvenient hours and face potential discontinuation by new municipal authorities. Mobile youth spaces, though innovative, are not universally available. While digital platforms promise support and information, limited internet access and digital literacy stand as obstacles. Safety in public areas is a significant concern, compounded by discriminatory practices, stereotypes, and poor management. These challenges are accentuated by insufficient funding and personnel.

Budgeting and financial challenges prevail, with many young individuals excluded from financial decision-making and unaware of funding opportunities. Public funds are often inadequate, and clear financial guidelines are missing for organizations. Urban projects generally attract more funding, sidelining rural initiatives that lack comprehensive research and statistics. Survival needs frequently overshadow developmental needs among the rural youth, further restricted by digital limitations and scarce networking chances. The unavailability of tools to evaluate the impact of rural youth work poses an additional challenge in securing essential funding.

## TAKING INTO ACCOUNT

The rural landscape presents myriad opportunities, especially for the youth sector. For youth policies, technological integration can act as a backbone, providing enhanced communication, education, and community development channels. Platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook bring closer direct engagement between citizens and authorities. Furthermore, potential policy adaptations could harness rural potential, with incentives such as tax breaks for ecotourism and certification support for local artisans.

For youth workers and other youth personnel, the intrinsic close-knit nature of rural communities paves the way for profound civic engagement. Actions taken resonate more prominently due to smaller populations, and digital tools offer expansive outreach and management capabilities.

The journey of a youth worker could evolve from being a beneficiary to an independent organizer, facilitated by these tools and local resources like councils, NGOs, and community support.

Youth workshops, information, and counselling find fertile ground in rural areas. The focus could shift to the creation of parks and recreational spaces, leveraging often agricultural-dominant areas. There's emphasis on establishing youth centers promoting non-formal education and diverse community-driven activities. Moreover, international collaborations, including volunteers and specialized training sessions, can offer enriching experiences. Qualified personnel and efficient information dissemination in such regions accentuate the impact of these endeavours.

Regarding youth structures, enhanced dialogue is essential. Combining technology, civic education, and engagement opens the doors to more interactive workshops and engagement activities. The role of NGOs in schools, leveraging digital tools like Google Grants, and inviting local authorities to youth-centric activities can further embed trust and cohesion. In a post-COVID world, the digital landscape becomes even more critical for rural youth, emphasizing adaptability.

Physical and virtual youth infrastructures in rural areas offer a plethora of modernization opportunities. Physical spaces, tailored to the community's needs, could have essentials ranging from basic stationery to sustainable systems like solar setups. NGOs could leverage outdoor spaces, advocating for the utilization of public realms for diverse activities. Virtual platforms play a pivotal role, from mentoring to emotional support hotlines, crafting an interconnected, supportive environment.

Lastly, funding is a cornerstone for youth projects. While myriad sources exist, challenges arise due to bureaucracy and sometimes the lack of rural-focused funds. The emphasis should be on tapping into both national and private funds, while simultaneously addressing core issues from non-formal education to mental health. Additionally, addressing operational costs, from salaries to communication expenses, solidifies the foundation for sustainable rural youth empowerment.

## HIGHLIGHTING THAT

In the envisioned ideal scenario for rural environments, the heart of youth policies revolves around nurturing European values. This proactive approach seeks to mitigate negative behaviors and forge a strong sense of shared citizenship. As non-formal education takes the forefront, especially in rural landscapes, its values need widespread promotion among families. Such an ideal framework ensures that rural areas bask in the opportunities of educational and professional exchange programs, alongside enriching linguistic twinning initiatives between schools. Echoing this is the strong appeal to align salaries with EU standards across countries and, most critically, secure proactive youth involvement in the decision-making tapestry. To bridge the urban-rural divide, decision-makers should visit rural territories annually, enhancing their understanding of localized challenges. Enriching this is the call for spaces where innovation and creativity thrive, while education systems actively interweave volunteerism and European tenets.

Central to the ideal youth worker scenario is equitable access to both formal and non-formal educational avenues. In this realm, educators become pillars of support, championing the significance of youth work. Training embarks early, with continual assessments, backed by robust financial backing that rewards competency. Here, the essence of competency tilts towards the practical, laying the foundation for comprehensive educational exposures. Empowering youth for independence, self-

reliance, and confidence becomes paramount. Concurrently, youth workers evolve as navigators, fostering better connections. A seamless union forms between traditional schools and non-formal educational hubs, all under the canopy of unwavering community backing.

The perfect dialogue between rural youth, their associated structures, and public authorities hinges on several keystones. Paramount among these is the professional enhancement of youth workers, standardized documentation across nations, and rigorous assessment by EU bodies. Civic education becomes obligatory, paving the path for proactive European citizenship. The dual forces of mobility and digitization play significant roles, emphasizing infrastructural development and the judicious balance between digital tools and human interactions. The spotlight remains firmly on inclusivity and civic participation, with overarching objectives benefiting the broader community.

Within this vision, youth-centric physical spaces transform into expansive, technologically adept zones, designed for autonomy and holistic wellness. From art workshops to study alcoves, these cultural hubs open their doors 24/7, prioritizing safety and inclusivity. Such centers, potentially self-sustaining, become focal points of creativity and learning.

Lastly, in a funding ideal context, the process turns straightforward, educational, and inclusive. Breaking through bureaucratic chains, funding moulds to the unique needs of rural youth, including the often marginalized immigrant and minority populations. Here, mentorship thrives, available in native languages, ensuring funds are impervious to political shifts and resonate with local to global issues. This culminates in a collaborative, equitable, and inclusive framework, driven by dedicated youth departments and permanent infrastructural solutions.

## CALL FOR MEASURES at European, national, regional, and local levels

In this context **we are calling for measures** at European, national, regional, and local levels, while putting forth the following recommendations:

1. To address challenges faced by rural youth, it's paramount to establish dedicated **youth centers or mobile centers for each village**. These centers should offer tailored activities, resonating with the local youth's needs. Policymakers, ranging from local to European, should be actively involved, ensuring rural youth representation. **Access to fundamental facilities**, from education to public transportation, must be ensured up to the age of 15. Alongside, initiatives promoting intercultural exchanges, non-formal education and addressing gender-based violence in rural areas are essential.
2. Empowerment can be achieved through **rural activities highlighting youth workers' skills**. Educationally, communities should be informed about funding opportunities and supported in project development.
3. Rural youth development requires understanding their learning needs, transforming ideas into tangible results through skill and capacity building. **Digital proficiency and the "Learning by doing" approach are pivotal**, ensuring experiential learning. Programs should foster **holistic development, emphasizing emotional intelligence and community-building**

**principles.** There's also an emphasis on civic awareness, introducing them to public institutions, NGOs, and project management. Targeted learning for ages 12-18 is especially crucial in areas with limited opportunities.

4. For budding youth workers and new NGOs, understanding national and EU processes is vital. **Attracting specialists**, especially in fields like mental health, is paramount, coupled with campaigns and **improved rural living conditions**.
5. The action agenda emphasizes **raising awareness, facilitating civic engagement, and continuously consulting with the youth**. Strengthening the community of youth workers and tailoring educational partnerships for them is essential. Efforts should extend to **mental health support, stakeholder collaboration, and feedback mechanisms** to drive continuous improvement.
6. **Networking platforms for youth workers are essential**. Recognizing their dedication through awards stands as a testament to their societal role.
7. A variety of programs are envisioned, from **capacity-building endeavors in rural NGOs** to language courses enhancing international collaboration. Financial support for rural youth projects and initiatives encouraging collaboration between youth workers and educators is crucial. Recognizing the dedication of youth workers through awards further underscores their role in society.
8. **Infrastructure for rural youth engagement can be enriched** by promoting NGOs and informal groups, emphasizing volunteer opportunities.
9. Community engagement is pivotal for effective governance. **Digital engagement through social media**, combined with offline methods like regular stakeholder meetings, ensures community voices are heard. Initiatives like "Mayor for a Day" can **bridge generational communication gaps**, and school curricula should **integrate non-formal education components**. Networking should be fortified with village networks focusing on resource-sharing. The promotion of NGOs and informal youth groups, emphasizing volunteerism, completes the infrastructure for youth engagement.
10. For enhanced youth infrastructure, active involvement within educational settings is vital. **Establishing youth councils** ensures young voices are consistently considered in decision-making. Intertwining youth centers with broader societal elements and constructing a detailed infrastructure framework is foundational.
11. Support schemes tailored for budding youth workers and new NGOs are indispensable. To attract specialized staff to rural areas, **incentives in education and community development are essential**. Enhancing rural living conditions and modernizing curricula can bridge service gaps. Civic education should meet national standards, and efficient communication between authorities and youth workers using simplified language is vital. **Ensuring a safe environment against extremist influences**, providing stable internet, and empowering youth programs are foundational infrastructure needs. Including those with special needs in decision-making and having stronger youth representation will ensure a holistic approach.
12. **Equity in funding is essential for rural support**. Simplified applications and a unified bureaucratic process can ease access for rural applicants. Providing initial funds and

recognizing the importance of youth workers in funding plans are key, as is guidance on diverse funding opportunities.

# ANNEX 1: "From RURAL to PLURAL"

## focus groups full report

### 1. YOUTH VISION

#### 1.1. Challenges

In many rural communities, the quest for a high-quality life and a genuine sense of safety for young individuals is riddled with a myriad of obstacles. At the heart of achieving a robust quality of life are essential facilities. These encompass basic infrastructure, clean water, access to medical and educational services, and most importantly, unhindered access to education itself. The foundation of any thriving society is ensuring that opportunities and conditions are equitable for everyone, irrespective of their background.

However, in this age of rapid technological advancements, merely having basic amenities isn't sufficient. Access to the internet in every village has emerged as a non-negotiable facet of a quality life, linking rural residents to a world of information, opportunities, and connections. Complementing this digital need is the physical realm's need for safe spaces, where young individuals can congregate, engage in recreational activities, and harness the benefits of sports playgrounds.

But even with these in place, transportation emerges as a significant bottleneck. In many rural regions, the public transportation system is characterized by being expensive, inappropriate, and indirect. The ripple effect of this is twofold. On one hand, it impedes access to larger cities, schools, and colleges located in neighbouring villages or towns. On the other, it stunts inter-village connectivity, making it harder for residents to establish connections within their region. Furthermore, the limited schedules of these transport services curtail opportunities even further, with many youths missing out on afterschool activities that can be vital for their overall development.

Safety, however, remains a paramount concern. Many young individuals in rural settings grapple with the unsettling realization that their calls to the police might not always ensure safety. This stems from a complex web of relationships where influential community figures like the mayor, the priest, teachers, and business owners might receive undue protection or preferential treatment from law enforcement agencies. Such biases can, at times, lead the police to turn a blind eye to pressing issues. A distressing manifestation of this is the toleration of domestic violence in certain communities, with authorities often failing to intervene.

Discrimination further exacerbates the challenges in these areas. Communities that are marginalized due to disabilities, ethnic backgrounds, or differing sexual orientations often find themselves bearing the brunt of prejudice. This not only fosters an environment of discrimination but in extreme cases, can result in outright segregation. The underrepresentation of social services, especially those catering to the needs of young people with disabilities, further accentuates the issues of inclusion and diversity. And while broader governing bodies like the EU aim to address these challenges, a tailored approach becomes crucial due to the inherent differences between regions.

Safety concerns span a broad spectrum, from the imperative to alter ingrained mentalities to bolstering the self-worth and self-esteem of young individuals. In today's digital age, the ease of accessing information, while mostly beneficial, can sometimes expose youth to detrimental influences. This begs the question: "How do we teach common sense?" The absence of psychologists

and counselors in rural schools further aggravates mental health issues. With cyberbullying being a prominent concern, the importance of mental and psychological fitness becomes even more evident. Yet, the professionals meant to address these concerns are either underpaid or scarce. Consequently, many youths find themselves gravitating towards larger cities in search of better opportunities and services.

These narratives and challenges cast a spotlight on the larger decisions made at local, regional, or national levels. The implementation and interpretation of European legislation in countries like Romania, and the capacity of the people entrusted with this task, are areas of concern. There's an evident need for laws and policies to be more reflective of local realities, especially when considering decisions like the age or grade of obligatory school education. These challenges underscore the importance of an integrated approach that marries grassroots realities with policy-making.

## 1.2. Opportunities

The integration of technology in rural communities has ushered in a wave of transformative changes, affecting multiple facets of daily life. Technology facilitates improved communication among community members and with local authorities. For instance, there are places where citizens and local governance engage in interactive dialogues through platforms like WhatsApp or Facebook groups, fostering transparent communication about ongoing projects and community decisions. Online public consultation platforms serve as another testament to this, where locals can proactively voice their opinions.

The educational landscape too is experiencing a shift, as technology paves the way for hybrid learning environments. Customized curricula have become feasible, catering to young individuals with specific learning needs. The rise of artificial intelligence sparks questions about the future of learning: How can AI redefine educational processes? And how do we handle the vast amounts of data generated? Beyond education, technology acts as a catalyst for socialization and community-building online. It bridges geographical boundaries, enabling individuals from different regions or countries to connect and share experiences. However, the value of nature remains paramount, emphasizing a need for a harmonious balance between online engagements and real-world experiences.

Ironically, as technology empowers new forms of communication, it has posed a challenge to traditional literacy. There are young individuals adept at texting but struggling with handwriting. Yet, the overarching benefits of technology cannot be understated. From facilitating online shopping, administrative tasks, and medical appointments, such as cloud-based medicine prescriptions, to bolstering security through surveillance systems, the advantages are manifold.

Intrinsically linked to technology is the importance of identity and self-worth. A pertinent question emerges: can technology play a role in enhancing one's sense of identity? Indeed, pieces of tradition are now accessible online, as observed in regions where local museums offer both physical and digital experiences. Local traditional businesses too are embracing this digital shift, transitioning their operations online, like online reservations for traditional lodgings.

Local resources offer a treasure trove of opportunities. The promise of a balanced work-life equation, where one can reside in a serene rural setting while working for an organization hundreds of kilometres away, is alluring. However, rural regions often lack professionals overseeing cultural and soft aspects. This void is sometimes filled by local action groups dedicated to community betterment.

As we delve into policy adaptation for rural areas, a plethora of possibilities unfurl. Rural areas, with their reduced living costs, present untapped potential for ventures like ecotourism. Initiatives in some places allow urban residents to experience rural life, offering tax benefits to participating rural hosts. A reimagined policy framework could champion teachers as community guides, simultaneously empowering young locals to showcase the beauty of their rural environs. Supporting traditional crafts through workshops, endorsing local producers with quality certifications, and fostering collaborative platforms between local authorities and the youth can revitalize rural areas. The aim should be to

spotlight and create job opportunities that can draw more young individuals to these locales. Additionally, advisory youth councils can offer invaluable insights to local governance.

Financial support in the form of soft loans could stimulate local businesses, especially in sectors like tourism. At the heart of rural communities is the sense of belonging and unity, making it essential for policies not just to dictate, but to be crafted in tandem with the community's desires. Events, like large-scale music festivals, can boost community development, drawing crowds and creating socio-economic opportunities.

In essence, intertwining technology, local resources, and adaptive policies can be the key to enhancing life opportunities and well-being for rural youth.

### 1.3. Dreaming on future

In the pursuit of an ideal rural community tailored for young individuals, several factors would come into play, making life not only liveable but vibrant and meaningful for its young inhabitants. Firstly, schools would serve as the foundation, actively promoting the message of "Be kind." The urgency of this message emerges from the observation of prevalent mean behaviours in educational institutions. Such environments would consistently echo European Values, ensuring that even the most mundane activities resonate with these principles.

The value of non-formal education would not be overshadowed by traditional curricula; instead, it would be heartily promoted. This would ensure that young people in these areas gain holistic development, equipped with both academic knowledge and life skills. To further imbue the essence of community and shared responsibility, the values of youth work would be communicated to the youngsters and their families.

There's immense potential in intercultural and knowledge exchange. To realize this potential fully, there would be robust exchange programs, fostering a sense of shared values and European citizenship. Such exchanges wouldn't be limited to students alone. Twinning programs would be introduced where schools would collaborate, allowing young people and teachers to communicate and learn in foreign languages. To support such ambitious endeavours, there would be an increase in the budget allocation for these exchange programs.

The community would also ensure that professional growth isn't stunted due to geographical limitations. Salaries would be competitive, attempting to bridge the apparent gap between earnings in the European Union and countries like Romania. And it's not just about academic exchange; there would be avenues for young professionals to engage in exchanges that boost their professional expertise and worldview.

Young people would play an integral role in decision-making processes at the community level. An informal youth council would collaborate directly with the mayor, ensuring that the voices of the youth aren't just heard but are instrumental in shaping policies. It would be pivotal to ensure the integrity of such councils, maintaining transparency and keeping corruption at bay.

To further bridge the divide between policymakers and the lived reality of rural communities, decision-makers would make it a point to visit these areas at least annually. This immersion would allow them to witness the challenges and opportunities firsthand, leading to more informed and empathetic decisions.

Innovation and creativity would not be mere buzzwords but a tangible reality. Spaces dedicated to fostering creativity would be commonplace, ensuring that the youth have outlets to express and innovate. Ahead of their final exams, young people would be motivated to undertake volunteering activities, a move that would serve a dual purpose: community development and instilling European values in the youngsters.

In essence, this dream rural community for the young would be an amalgamation of learning, growth, community involvement, and advocacy, all converging to create an environment where the youth don't just live but thrive.

## 1.4. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCRETE MEASURES

- **Establishment of Youth Centers:** Each village should have a dedicated youth center, offering diverse training opportunities tailored to the needs and interests of the local youth.
- **Multi-level Policy Engagement:** It's crucial to engage and address policymakers across various levels - local, national, regional, and European, ensuring that rural youth issues are consistently represented.
- **Basic Accessibility Rights:** Every young individual, up to the age of 15, should be guaranteed access to basic facilities such as education, the internet, and public transportation.
- **Intercultural Exchanges and Events:** A regular subvention should be allocated for promoting intercultural exchanges and organizing intercultural events for young people, fostering a sense of unity and understanding.
- **Public Decision-Making in Curriculum:** Introduce public decision-making as a subject in the school curriculum for students aged 14 to 18. Further, training focusing on decision-making processes can be incorporated.
- **Emphasis on Non-formal Education:** Local authorities should actively support and promote non-formal education, amplifying the frequency and reach of such activities in rural regions.
- **Encouraging Youth Entrepreneurship:** Various supportive measures can be instituted for young entrepreneurs such as tax breaks, initial capital loans, favorable loan policies, and exclusive funding programs, and efforts should be made to ensure the EU makes outreach efforts to youth in remote rural communities.
- **Youth Representation in Town Councils:** Every village should have a youth representative, ensuring the youth perspective is consistently considered in town council discussions and decisions.
- **Annual Twinning Exchange Program:** Initiate an annual exchange or twinning program at the European level specifically tailored for individuals from rural areas, fostering broader perspectives and understanding.
- **Mobile Youth Centers:** Advocate for the establishment of mobile youth centers, staffed by youth workers who are public servants, much like firefighters or policemen.
- **Broadband Internet Support:** Investing in and supporting broadband internet access in rural areas is paramount for education, business, and social connectivity.
- **Village Advisory Groups:** Each village should have an elected advisory group that specifically addresses the concerns and aspirations of its youth.
- **Utilizing School Infrastructure in Summer:** Schools shouldn't lie dormant during the summer. Instead, they could be hubs for extracurricular and non-formal activities for rural youth.
- **Promotion of Volunteerism:** Authorities should actively promote and support the engagement of young individuals in volunteer activities, spanning a range of sectors from charity work to democratic participation.
- **Addressing Gender-Based Violence:** There should be concerted efforts to increase awareness about gender-based violence in rural areas. Additionally, the application and enforcement of relevant legislations at the local level should be reinforced.



## 2. HUMAN RESOURCES

### 2.1. Challenges

Youth workers and other professionals who collaborate with the young population in rural territories face a myriad of challenges that often compromise their capacity to offer consistent support and mentorship. One of the significant challenges, especially for those who reside outside these areas, is transportation. The limited accessibility often acts as a deterrent due to the additional resources and money required to traverse between cities and rural regions. Furthermore, the unique context of rural environments presents its own set of issues. An observable lack of enthusiasm among the youth towards participation is evident, possibly stemming from an insular environment marked by limited exposure and opportunities. This very vacuum often leads to an exodus of young individuals seeking broader horizons in urban areas, thus rendering the role of youth workers somewhat redundant.

The demands on a youth worker in such contexts are multifold, often requiring them to wear multiple hats. They frequently find themselves in positions where they are expected to offer services that extend beyond their immediate job description and, often, without additional remuneration. In situations where these professionals are ill-equipped to deal with certain challenges, beneficiaries could feel neglected or overlooked. This multi-role expectation sometimes forces them to engage with family members or even school educators, amplifying the demands on their time and energy. This, combined with instances where youth work is not adequately compensated, necessitates them to take up additional employment. Such parallel engagements might interfere with their primary responsibilities and alter the dynamics of their relationship with the youth.

What exacerbates the situation is the lack of recognition and understanding of the youth worker role. Often misconstrued as a mere hobby or even dismissed as an insignificant occupation, they have to contend with unnecessary bureaucratic pressures and hurdles. Outreach becomes another critical area of concern. Given that the role of a youth worker isn't traditional, establishing trust and maintaining consistent engagement with the youth becomes challenging. This is further aggravated by the pressures of the job, often leading to burnout and mental health concerns.

Concerning the efficacy of their services, youth workers who are an intrinsic part of the community tend to have a deeper impact due to their familiarity with local nuances. In contrast, those detached from these communities might approach projects without adequate consultation or focus on the youth. There arises an essential question: How can a community that lacks youth workers foster one from within its ranks?

When delving into the recruitment and retention aspect, the accessibility to non-formal educational opportunities emerges as a significant challenge. The dominance of the formal education system, coupled with the lack of priority given to extracurricular activities by families, often sidelines the role of youth workers. The pull of cities, laden with opportunities, further exacerbates the issue as many young individuals migrate in search of better prospects. If the youth remains oblivious to the opportunities presented by non-formal activities, the very foundation of recruiting youth workers in rural areas gets shaken, presenting a conundrum that needs addressing.

### 2.2. Opportunities

Rural areas, contrary to common misconceptions, offer a range of unique assets that can be invaluable for youth workers. The expansive natural and open spaces prevalent in such regions not only provide serenity but also open up a plethora of outdoor activity options. The sense of tight-knit community, where everyone knows everyone else, instills a strong sense of civic engagement. Such familiarity also translates to easier access to local institutions, making outreach and coordination simpler for youth workers.

Furthermore, the residents of these rural areas possess a unique, grounded perspective about urban spaces, which can be an asset in itself. Knowledge, as they say, is power. The rural backdrop also ensures that the level of stress experienced here is comparatively lower than in bustling cities. The heightened sense of safety and freedom encourages families to let their youth spend more time outside. This environment, coupled with a profound respect for nature, fosters environmental stewardship. The vast stretches of available land can be repurposed for erecting new infrastructures, and the generally lower living costs further enhance the appeal of rural regions. Since these areas tend to have smaller populations and not as much civic engagement, any initiative taken has a pronounced impact on the community. Moreover, due to the smaller populace, there's typically less competition, providing a broader space for activities and initiatives to flourish.

The integration of digital technology into these regions can further enhance the developmental opportunities for rural youth and youth workers. Platforms like social media, given there's digital access, can reach a significant portion of the community. This can be leveraged to disseminate creative content, connect with people from different regions, and foster online communities where information about youth events can be shared. The allure of visually appealing content can pique interest in activities, and showcasing them to families can mitigate any distrust they might harbor towards youth workers. Messaging platforms like Viber, Telegram, and Whatsapp can be instrumental in promoting events. The suite of online tools, including the likes of the Google Suite, can simplify the logistical management of events and projects. Online events, including meetings, gaming sessions, and film nights, can be organized with relative ease. The rising trend of the digital youth worker and the incorporation of tools like Google Translate, Google Maps, and financial transfer applications, coupled with AI, can create a more accessible environment, especially for individuals with disabilities.

Local resources can further buttress these endeavors. Encouraging young people to assume roles in public institutions can empower them, giving them both a voice and a platform to shape their community. Tapping into the local council for funds, collaborating with local NGOs, informal groups, and local associations can provide access to essential software and spaces.

Furthermore, transforming young people into youth workers follows a strategic progression. The initial step involves making them beneficiaries while actively engaging with them. It's essential to familiarize oneself with them, providing them with knowledge about opportunities, and understanding their needs. Educating them about how the system operates and empowering them with responsibilities can instill a sense of purpose. The transition from being a beneficiary to a volunteer, then evolving into a team member, followed by organizing events independently, undergoing additional training, culminates in their transformation into proficient youth workers. This journey is underscored by the overarching sentiment of community belongingness.

### **2.3. Dreaming on future**

In an envisioned dream scenario, where every rural youth has seamless access to both formal and non-formal education, the landscape of education would transform dramatically. The shift would involve an equitable accessibility paradigm where both forms of education are held in high regard, thus ensuring a well-rounded educational experience. This landscape would experience an invigorated support from educators, leading to a broader community awareness about the significance of youth work.

With the advancements in technology, its integration into education would become more profound. The overarching goal of education would metamorphose to emphasize lifelong learning and adaptability, as these are essential attributes in an ever-changing world. In such an environment, virtually everyone would have had some exposure to working with the youth or even volunteering, ensuring a deep understanding of their unique requirements and aspirations. The competencies emphasized in this setting would prioritize practical application, moving away from a strictly theoretical framework. This would warrant an earlier commencement of trainer training programs

and the institution of robust evaluation mechanisms, ensuring continuous performance assessment. Furthermore, the financial structuring for youth workers would be redesigned to ensure they're adequately compensated, with a basic level of income that escalates in tandem with their skills and competences.

In this paradigm, the roles of various stakeholders can be metaphorically compared to the building of a house. Youth, representing the family keen on building a house but unsure about their precise requirements, would be at the core. Volunteers and youth leaders, analogous to the construction crew, would assist in the actual building, incorporating their insights and experiences to cater to the family's needs. Youth workers would take on the mantle of the extended family, providing the requisite knowledge and active guidance throughout the house-building journey, ensuring that the final construct mirrors the family's vision.

The development of competencies would play a pivotal role in this framework. For the youth, the primary gains would be in understanding available opportunities better, leading to informed choices that resonate with their innate strengths and passions. This would enhance their self-awareness and spur their personal growth journey. Youth workers, in this context, would focus on nurturing autonomy, self-sufficiency, courage, and confidence among the youth. Their role would amplify in ensuring superior quality of projects, forging stronger connections with the youth, and providing more effective guidance.

A key feature of this dream scenario would be the elevated recognition of non-formal education, placing it on par with its formal counterpart. This equivalence would foster collaborations between non-formal educational outlets and mainstream schools, creating symbiotic relationships that benefit the learners. Public educational institutions would carve out dedicated spaces for non-formal educational activities, blurring the lines between the two. This convergence might also lead to educators being trained as youth workers, harnessing non-formal methodologies to enhance the learning experience.

Finally, community involvement and support would become indispensable. Be it through leveraging social media to disseminate news or providing essential supplies and venues for meetings, the community would play an active role. Their engagement wouldn't be restricted to just logistical support but would extend to active participation in activities, attending events, and providing feedback. Authorities, recognizing the significance of these initiatives, would actively disseminate information, attend events, and offer constructive feedback post-events, thus cementing their commitment to the youth's holistic development.

## 2.4. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCRETE MEASURES

### Rural Youth Learning Needs

- **Skill Development & Capacity Building:** Implement strategies that educate youth on the transformation of ideas into tangible results, focusing on understanding the mechanisms of change.
- **Civic Awareness:** Introduce programs to acquaint youth with public institutions and promote civic engagement; Emphasize on the significance and operations of NGOs, coupled with workshops on project drafting and management.
- **Digital Proficiency:** Establish training centers or online platforms that cater to honing digital skills, considering the increasing importance of digital literacy in the current age.
- **Experiential Learning:** Advocate for the "Learning by doing" approach, focusing on out-of-school activities that allow youth to gain hands-on experience.
- **Holistic Development:** Curate programs centered on personal growth that encompass emotional intelligence, public speaking, and effective communication modules.
- **Community Building:** Encourage initiatives that help the youth understand the power of association and the importance of forming communities to bring about positive change.

- **Targeted Learning Programs:** Special focus should be given to learning programs for youth aged 12-18, addressing their specific needs and filling the opportunity gaps, especially in areas where such opportunities are scant.

### Action Steps

- **Awareness and Advocacy:** Organize campaigns and movements to raise awareness about the diverse needs of rural youth.
- **Civic Engagement:** Facilitate platforms that bolster youth participation in civic and public affairs.
- **Strengthening the Youth Worker Community:** Establish gatherings or unions for youth workers to exchange knowledge and best practices.
- **Youth Consultation:** Create frameworks and contexts to regularly consult young people about their evolving needs.
- **Training and Development:** Implement programs that help rural youth transition into roles of youth workers; Offer mentoring and training opportunities to nurture a network of rural youth workers at local, national, and international levels.
- **Mental Health Initiatives:** Introduce mental health support systems that include meetings and specialized programs tailored for rural youth.
- **Stakeholder Collaboration:** Organize meetings between youth workers, parents, educators, and public authorities to create a common understanding and appreciation for youth work.
- **Educational Partnerships:** Collaborate with educational institutions to blend formal and non-formal learning experiences.
- **Academic Advancements:** Advocate for the introduction of university degrees specifically designed for aspiring youth workers.
- **Feedback Systems:** Design and introduce mechanisms that allow regular feedback from the youth, ensuring continuous improvement in programs and initiatives.

### Program Types

- **Capacity Building:** Develop training and mentoring programs specifically designed for new rural youth workers.
- **Experiential Learning:** Offer internships in rural NGOs to provide on-ground experience.
- **Language and Communication:** Facilitate English courses and other language support initiatives to bolster international collaboration among youth workers.
- **Networking:** Provide platforms for youth workers to not only connect but actively engage with a larger community of practitioners. This should include regular meetings, discussions, training sessions, and study visits.
- **Financial Support:** Design funding opportunities exclusively for rural youth projects to reduce competition with urban-centric initiatives.
- **Collaborative Programs:** Promote cooperation between youth workers and educators, backed by local authority funding, to integrate non-formal education into traditional academic settings.

**Recognition and Awards:** Introduce initiatives, such as a "Youth Worker of the Year" award, to recognize and honor the contributions of youth workers at a national level.

## YOUTH WORK, INFORMATION AND COUNSELING

### 3.1. Challenges

Rural youth often navigate a complex labyrinth of challenges when seeking quality youth work, information, and counseling services. Fundamental to addressing these challenges is the resource allocation. Without adequate resources, ranging from budgets and trained personnel to appropriate infrastructure, the efforts of even the most dedicated youth workers could be rendered ineffective. Youth workers, for their efficacy, must be not only well-educated but also deeply motivated. This motivation is imperative for establishing info centers that serve as bridges between youth workers and the younger generation, ensuring their needs are met and their voices heard.

State spaces emerge as another pivotal need, playing a crucial role in youth-focused projects. Beyond just being spaces for interaction, their marketing and communication about these centers and projects is vital. It's not merely about spreading the word; it's about stirring emotions, evoking feelings, and fostering a genuine connection. To this end, communication emerges as a key element. It's a two-way street wherein youth workers need to actively engage in conversations, ensuring they both talk to and listen to the youth. Peer counseling, leveraging a buddy system, provides an effective way to disseminate essential messages, ensuring they resonate more deeply.

The spectrum of support encompasses various facets – from advice and monetary assistance to logistical support like transportation and permissions for youth-related activities. Extracurricular activities, especially those rooted in sports and arts, offer youths a chance to explore their passions and potentials. These are complemented by safe spaces where they can engage freely, workshops promoting experiential learning, and programs that cater to diverse durations and depths. Expert facilitators play a dual role here - steering the learning journey and ensuring the right financial scaffolding supports it. In this digitally connected age, social media emerges as a powerful ally, providing a platform for showcasing activities, sharing experiences, and drawing inspiration. But underlying all this is a core tenet: motivation. Without the right impetus, involvement remains elusive. Here, technology serves as both a bridge and a beacon, enabling connections beyond rural confines. To harness this, there's an evident need for technology tutors and a broader development plan that dovetails personal guidance with management strategies.

Yet, despite these potential solutions, challenges abound. Many rural youths grapple with a pervasive information deficit, unsure of the opportunities awaiting them or the processes that facilitate personal and professional growth. Bureaucracy and corruption loom large, often stymieing their aspirations. The ramifications of this are multifold – from diminished self-esteem to a reluctance in embracing risks or novel experiences. Communication challenges, accentuated by an intergenerational gap, exacerbate these problems. Biases of the older generation, rooted in dated labels and experiences, often misalign with the aspirations and values of today's youth. This results in a dissonance, sometimes making community support seem an alien concept to young individuals.

The paucity of dedicated youth centers in rural areas, coupled with mindset challenges, often alienates youths. This alienation is compounded by a perceived value disconnect between them and established systems or authorities. Rural youths often view migration to urban centers as the sole avenue for progress, driven by a lack of rural opportunities or the

allure of cities. This migration is often exacerbated by societal pressures, which alter their priorities.

Furthermore, outside of formal education or work, recreational or developmental activities are scarce. By the time they reach the pivotal gymnasium's graduation milestone, many have already left their rural roots. Here, youth centers could serve as lifelines, offering a plethora of activities and opportunities. Yet, the awareness and motivation to access rights and opportunities remain low. Public transportation challenges, bureaucracy, and corruption further dampen their spirits. A lack of confidence, possibly stemming from the fear of judgment or inadequate peer support, often hinders their proactive involvement. Additionally, the limited presence of active NGOs or volunteers exacerbates the issue. The stark age gap between generations particularly manifests in matters of sexuality and gender, where the older generation's biases and dismissiveness clash with the youth's core values.

In many rural contexts, the youth's needs often remain overshadowed, primarily because they represent a minority. This is aggravated by bureaucracy, which, in its excess or deficiency, impedes accessibility to essential services. Marginalized groups face heightened challenges, with language barriers furthering the divide, as seen in contexts like the dynamics between two ethnic groups. Discrimination, rooted in skin color or stereotypes, not only perpetuates poverty but also erodes the self-worth of many. Coupled with inadequate communication channels with local or national governments and societal pressures, their journey becomes even more arduous. The role of transportation, or the lack thereof, and the pressing need for streamlined, digitalized bureaucratic processes cannot be overstated in addressing these challenges.

### 3.2. Opportunities

In addressing the challenges faced by rural youth, there are numerous existing and potential opportunities that can enhance youth work in their communities. A prime example is the development of parks that cater to specific activities relevant to the local setting. In areas predominantly reserved for agriculture, having a designated space for recreational activities can provide much-needed leisure opportunities. This goes beyond just a scenic spot in nature; it's about creating spaces tailored for outdoor activities that entertain and engage the young population.

Similarly, logistics, particularly in terms of public transportation, play a crucial role in supporting both school-related and leisure activities. Enhanced transportation services can determine whether local facilities become vibrant hubs of youth activity or remain underutilized.

Youth centers can act as pivotal spaces for young people, offering a plethora of opportunities from non-formal education to different projects and community-driven artistic or sports activities. Such centers could also benefit from the participation of international volunteers, injecting new perspectives and innovative ideas into community projects.

The role of volunteers cannot be understated. Young volunteers can offer fresh insights, and their involvement can breathe life into various initiatives, from Summer Schools to specialized training in areas like management and conflict resolution. Securing scholarships for commuters can also serve as a boon, making it easier for rural youth to access educational opportunities outside their immediate surroundings.

While kick starting such initiatives is essential, ensuring continued participation and commitment can pose challenges. Engaging young people, maintaining their interest, and keeping them motivated can be arduous tasks. However, different platforms can offer mentorship, guiding young individuals in navigating opportunities.

Feedback is crucial. By facilitating open channels of communication, communities can better understand the interests and hobbies of their young members. Creating interest groups can be particularly effective in this regard, providing a space for shared learning and skill development.

However, for youth voices to truly make an impact, it's imperative that decision-making entities, like older stakeholders and municipal bodies, recognize and respect the contributions of youth councils and NGOs. These organizations can play a pivotal role in shaping community development, and their insights can be invaluable.

The digital age offers additional avenues for engagement. Both online and offline platforms are crucial, especially for rural NGOs and informal groups. Digital platforms utilized in educational settings can foster better communication between families, youth workers, and students. Such platforms can also act as repositories of information, streamlining communication and making vital resources easily accessible.

Generational gaps, while challenging, highlight the importance of creating spaces where different age groups can interact, fostering understanding and bridging divides. Establishing an information platform specifically for rural youth workers can consolidate essential resources, adopting a "one-stop-shop" approach that simplifies access and encourages social interaction.

The decision-making process within communities can also benefit from an infusion of youth perspectives. By integrating young people into administrative roles and processes, communities can ensure more balanced and forward-thinking development.

Having professionals on board to navigate the complexities of bureaucracy can greatly assist young individuals in securing funding or navigating new challenges, such as integrating migrants into the community. In the age of digital information, ensuring that these young individuals have access to accurate and relevant news is crucial. Establishing interest groups that can help communities grow without the influence of fake news is more important than ever.

In essence, while villages may be small in size, their potential for growth and development is vast. With the right resources, support, and channels of communication, rural youth can play an instrumental role in shaping the future of their communities.

### 3.3. Dreaming on future

In a envisioned future where rural youth are well-rounded individuals, the role of an effective information system and counseling services becomes pivotal in shaping their growth and development. The establishment of youth clubs and centers takes precedence, providing a hub where young individuals can congregate, share their interests, feelings, and concerns. These spaces are more than just physical infrastructures; they embody a vision where transportation woes are a thing of the past, and young people no longer grapple with mobility concerns.

In this ideal context, technologies, especially artificial intelligence, have found their way into schools and interest groups, not only as educational tools but also as solutions to pressing issues. The youth, no longer inhibited by societal judgments or the fear of encountering substance abuse, are empowered to work on their projects in safe, nurturing environments.

A digital platform emerges as a cornerstone, allowing youth to exchange best practices, discuss non-formal education techniques used in youth work, and brainstorm contexts for implementing innovative ideas. International volunteering takes on a new dimension, fostering improved collaboration between local and international teams.

One of the most salient shifts is the recognition and validation of the youth worker's role. No longer relegated to the peripheries and tethered to unstable, project-based engagements, youth workers are adequately compensated and enjoy job security. This recognition is especially crucial in smaller villages, where the demand for recreational and entertainment activities is heightened. To further buttress these efforts, national governments step in, offering grants to encourage rural youth to pursue opportunities without leaving their hometowns.

A rejuvenated sense of social responsibility envelopes the community. Young people are not just beneficiaries but active stakeholders. They are given property rights and collaborate in shaping their physical spaces, reflecting their needs and aspirations. The educational landscape undergoes a metamorphosis, bridging gaps in human resources and infrastructure. This holistic approach has a cascading effect, arresting the phenomenon of rural depopulation and instilling a renewed sense of hope and optimism.

Integral to this transformation is the inner journey of the rural youth. They exude confidence, empowered to partake actively in decision-making processes that directly affect them. This newfound assurance is buttressed by the availability of a robust support system, ensuring they always have a safety net to fall back on. The cultivation of social and soft skills becomes paramount, addressing feelings of isolation, loneliness, and depression, which are often magnified in rural settings.

This inclusive atmosphere also manifests in their interpersonal relations. Rural youth are more welcoming towards foreigners, underpinned by trust and empathy. This open-mindedness paves the way for international volunteers to become a staple in rural communities, no longer an anomaly but a valuable resource.

In conclusion, in this envisioned world, rural youth are not just beneficiaries of development; they are active contributors, shaping their destinies, and, in the process, rejuvenating their communities.

### 3.4. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCRETE MEASURES

#### Community Engagement and Feedback:

- **Active Community Feedback:** Launch social media initiative groups centered around themes of interest, like greening initiatives or community budgets. Establish a swift-response unit for petitions and complaints to address issues promptly and efficiently.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Organize recurrent meetings with stakeholders, ensuring these are scheduled at convenient times to foster maximum participation.
- **Local Platforms for Community Voice:** Set up local platforms, like dedicated social media groups, ensuring the level of formality aligns with community expectations. Employ a blend of online and offline communication methods, including meetings and informational brochures.
- **Educative Communication:** While all communication channels could form the foundation, the subsequent focus should be on effecting tangible change in the community through education.
- **Policy Engagement:** Arrange monthly meetings with policymakers, particularly those deemed unapproachable by rural youth, to boost their self-confidence and self-representation.
- **International Youth Interaction:** Facilitate public debates with youth from different countries through dedicated forum platforms.

#### Youth Empowerment and Activities:

- **Rural Festivals:** Organize village-specific festivals where youth workers can showcase and share their skills.
- **Youth Empowerment Activities:** Implement activities that bridge generational communication gaps, such as "Mayor for a Day" endeavors, ensuring youth needs are addressed and that they're part of the organizing committee.
- **Community Promotion:** Elevate community visibility in decision-making, underscoring its relevance through positive actions. Highlight rural youth activities to bolster the village image, thereby enticing stakeholders to invest in youth activities.
- **Educational Initiatives:** Educate community members about available funding opportunities and guide them in project development through a specialized government structure equipped with the necessary competencies. Revise school curricula to incorporate non-formal education, allowing students the freedom to select subjects based on their interests and needs, with



professional youth workers guiding the non-formal educational modules.

#### **Networking and Structured Planning:**

- **Village Networks:** Initiate a network of villages that meet regularly. Annually, youth representatives from these villages should convene with local authorities to address cross-community concerns. Emphasize resource-sharing as a best practice or requisite within these networks. Aim to foster partnerships through shared experiences, interest groups, and collaborative efforts between municipalities.
- **Structured Planning for Youth Activities:** Guide youth in crafting well-structured plans for their activities, which may include project drafting, campaign development, or strategies to amplify their voices.

#### **Infrastructure and Opportunities**

- **NGOs and Informal Youth Groups:** Encourage the formation of more NGOs, clubs, and informal groups as contexts for youth learning. These entities should be motivated to offer more volunteering opportunities and youth work positions, thereby enriching the structural and infrastructural fabric of rural youth engagement.

## YOUTH STRUCTURES

### 4.1. Challenges

In certain areas, younger individuals, even if they are founders of NGOs or informal groups, often find themselves at a disadvantage compared to elder yet possibly less experienced youth workers. Layers of bureaucracy often pose daunting challenges. Fortunately, in many of these areas, internet connectivity is commendable, helping bridge communication gaps in the digital age. However, trust between national agencies and young leaders or youth workers remains a concerning issue. Reviving dormant NGOs also proves to be a tough task.

In other regions, there's a palpable knowledge gap. Youth workers often grapple with the protocols needed to engage with authorities or to understand the nuances of establishing and managing NGOs. This lack of clarity becomes even more pronounced when dealing with grant providers, with long waiting times for scheduled appointments.

In some locales, the lines of communication between youth and authorities are frayed. Authorities are often perceived as being out of touch with the genuine concerns and aspirations of the youth.

Exploring the capacity and resources of youth structures further unravels more complexities. In particular regions, sustaining a youth NGO becomes a formidable challenge due to the migratory patterns of the youth, who often spend weekdays in cities for educational purposes, returning to their rural roots only on weekends. Moreover, there's often a blurred line between official duties and other unrelated tasks, which can dilute the focus of the mission.

In certain territories, challenges arise when justifying the need for funds to support the youth who might eventually move to urban centers. Encouraging youth participation in representative structures and aligning these structures with school activities can create a harmonious ecosystem for youth development.

In some villages, counting and reporting tangible community changes to grant authorities becomes an intricate affair. Mobilizing the youth demands reaching out to them in unconventional spaces, like schools. The lack of consistent transportation, often dependent on parents or guardians, further complicates matters.

Regarding representation, there's a growing sentiment that youth should be consulted on how they want to be represented. Instead of enforcing predefined structures, listening to their voices becomes paramount. The challenge often lies in differentiating between school work and youth activities, emphasizing the importance of holistic personal development alongside academic pursuits.

Lastly, integrating marginalized groups into mainstream dialogues is paramount. There are instances where groups collaborate on an educational level to champion better representation, simultaneously facilitating access to democratic rights for marginalized sections.

### 4.2. Opportunities

In some areas, many young individuals are unaware of the potential they hold to engage in city councils. To bridge this knowledge gap, youth organizations are taking the initiative by conducting workshops and facilitating activities that enhance their access to such platforms. While there used to be a digital platform to streamline this process, efforts are underway to launch something innovative where young people can directly share their grievances or innovative ideas with the concerned authorities.

In certain regions, NGOs focusing on youth issues often collaborate with schools. They introduce lectures presented by young speakers, typically those below 25. This age group, despite their potential and relevance, struggles to secure sufficient support from funders. Yet, these young lecturers often draw immense encouragement from their peers and some forward-thinking educators. Connecting

with international programs has given these youth structures exposure to others facing similar challenges, providing both a sense of solidarity and potential solutions. However, the common hurdle is the lack of monetary support, which sometimes affects motivation. If a proposal is presented merely as an idea without a concrete plan, it often fails to unlock opportunities. Platforms like Google Grants for Nonprofits are yet untapped gold mines in some places, offering NGOs the necessary tools to bolster their digital presence and operations.

In other territories, youth workers find it challenging to provide qualitative feedback on personal growth and are mostly confined to sharing quantitative project-related data. To foster trust and maintain a connection with the local authorities, they often involve them in their activities, even if the participation from the latter is minimal. It's believed that consistent transparency and communication can eventually pave the way for stronger bonds between the youth, their mentors, and the governing bodies.

Understanding the desires and aspirations of the youth is essential. Once there's clarity on this front, it becomes easier to usher them into new challenges, eradicating any inherent fears. Emphasizing visibility, some regions believe in the power of the media. Inviting journalists to cover youth-centric activities or hiring a publicist to market these initiatives across platforms can do wonders. Establishing a strong brand identity, whether through captivating logos or other visual elements, can also magnetize participants. Some places are even leveraging artificial intelligence to generate content but are yet to establish comprehensive guidelines for its optimal use.

The influence of role models, especially in the digital age, cannot be overlooked. In certain rural areas, platforms like TikTok have overshadowed traditional hobbies. While it keeps the youth engaged, it also serves as a source of potential misinformation. This calls for a system that educates the youth about cross-verifying facts and discerning fake news from the truth. Given the limited recreational alternatives in such regions, providing the youth with tools to critically analyze information becomes crucial.

The upbringing and education of a child play pivotal roles in shaping their ability to discern facts from fiction. Encouraging inter-village mobility can also offer fresh perspectives. In some places, involving authority figures in dialogues with the youth can be beneficial.

When it comes to amplifying the visibility of rural youth initiatives and empowering them, blending art with advocacy stands out as a promising approach. Activities that combine creative expression like drama or mural painting with discussions on societal issues can amplify the voice of the youth. On another note, youth councils, acting as umbrella organizations, offer visibility and access to training sessions in exchange for an annual fee. However, instances of internal corruption pose concerns.

Lastly, the post-covid era has ushered in a surge of online opportunities. This democratization of access has especially benefited rural communities, offering them a plethora of opportunities that were previously beyond their reach.

### 4.3. Dreaming on future

Envisioning a future where there's a continuous, constructive dialogue between rural youth, their structures, and public authorities presents a mosaic of ideas and possibilities. Central to this vision is the significance of cooperation. Should there be seamless collaboration amongst all rural initiatives, it would undoubtedly enhance the efficacy of youth work. However, a looming concern is the competence of officers at the national level. Some feel these officers, often devoid of practical experience, may not adeptly implement European initiatives. To create something truly sustainable, it is pivotal that a shared vision exists between the youth, youth workers, and authorities.

The idea that the European Union could play a more active role in monitoring or training these national officers has been suggested. A harmonized framework across countries, particularly concerning the documentation required for various projects, could further streamline processes.

Beginning with formal education, introducing young individuals to their roles as active European citizens is essential. Civic education, preferably spearheaded by qualified teachers and youth workers, should be the cornerstone. And yet, there persists a challenge regarding the definition and scope of a youth worker's role. In some places, these professionals often get sidetracked into numerous ancillary tasks, risking the loss of focus on youth, particularly in rural locales. An idea inspired by a youth program in another region proposes shadowing initiatives within communities to facilitate the training of new youth workers.

Emphasizing the importance of civic education, some argue for its mandatory inclusion in academic curricula. Currently being voluntary in some regions, NGOs find it challenging to collaborate with formal educational institutions..

The professionalization of youth work is underscored by many. While the financial constraints are recognized, especially with tight budgets, there's an inclination towards cultivating youth programs that focus on training young individuals, eventually morphing them into mentors and subsequently, a robust youth workforce. In promoting cooperation, it's emphasized that rural youth should be empowered to voice their opinions before larger groups. In this endeavor, youth workers, hand in hand with educational institutions, should converge towards a unified vision.

Mobility is another dimension. To foster exchanges and the dissemination of ideas, there's a call for improved mobility infrastructures for rural youth. Some regions have leveraged start-up or municipal funds, catering to specific groups to facilitate such mobility. Furthermore, youth structures, buoyed by funding calls, offer extensive support for endeavors like fundraising campaigns.

Navigating the realms of digitalization, inclusion, sustainability, and civic engagement, some reservations arise. Projects that mandate categorizing participants have been criticized, with calls for objectives that embrace everyone universally. While digital tools, like electronic signatures, can simplify project management, a palpable need for human connection persists. In today's age, where digitalization is omnipresent, the human element is felt more than ever. A significant portion of the youth lacks digital skills, highlighting the urgency for adequate training.

In the digital realm, social media platforms, often criticized for being echo chambers, amplify content, including misinformation. The pressing need, then, is to counterbalance this trend. Ensuring the safe and discerning use of digital tools and media remains paramount in these discussions.

#### 4.4. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCRETE MEASURES

##### 1. Support and Navigation for New Youth Workers

- **Support Scheme:** Introduce a comprehensive support scheme tailored for novice youth workers and newly formed informal groups or NGOs, aiding them in navigating both national and EU bureaucratic processes.
- **Local Opportunity Sharing:** Encourage sharing of available local resources and potential opportunities, aiding rural youth in identifying and addressing issues.
- **Enhanced Reporting:** Streamline processes for rural youth to report issues to relevant local and national authorities, ensuring swift action and feedback.

##### 2. Enhancing Attractiveness of Rural Areas for Specialized Staff

- **Rural Education Incentives:** Implement programs to boost the appeal of teaching and youth work in rural settings, emphasizing infrastructural and professional development.
- **Community Spaces:** Develop multipurpose community spaces in rural areas, facilitating both formal and informal youth activities.
- **Local Transport Solutions:** Craft localized transportation policies that cater specifically to the unique mobility needs of rural youth and youth workers.

##### 3. Addressing Community Needs through Specialist Availability

- **Specialist Attraction Campaigns:** Run targeted campaigns to attract and retain specialists in areas such as sexual education, mental health, and medical support.

- **Improving Rural Living Conditions:** Propose incentives to make rural living more viable and attractive for specialists, youth workers, and investors.
4. Bridging Formal and Informal Education:
- **Curriculum Adaptation:** Revise and modernize formal education curricula, ensuring it remains relevant to contemporary youth needs.
  - **Integrating Informal Education:** Foster collaborations between formal educators, youth workers, and parents to integrate informal education techniques and content into standard curricular.
  - **Youth Work Recognition:** Enhance awareness regarding the professional nature of youth work, emphasizing its objectives and importance beyond mere leisurely activities.
5. Enhancing Civic Education and Coordination:
- **Integration with National Institutions:** Ensure civic education is coordinated and in alignment with national educational goals and standards.
  - **Improved Authority-Youth Worker Communication:** Facilitate effective communication between local authorities and youth workers, using a shared and simplified language to navigate bureaucratic procedures.
  - **Awareness Campaigns:** Launch local awareness campaigns in community hot-spots, informing the public about available resources and providing a platform for dialogue with authorities.
6. Addressing Extremist Influences and Safety
- **Community Vigilance:** Maintain a vigilant stance against extremist influences in rural communities, encouraging collaboration between students, teachers, parents, and youth workers to foster a safe and inclusive environment.
7. Infrastructure and Resource Needs
- **Connectivity Initiatives:** Prioritize the establishment of stable internet connections in rural areas, facilitating interconnectivity among rural youth centers.
  - **Mental Health Support:** Provide accessible and free mental health resources tailored for both youth workers and rural youth, addressing issues like bullying.
  - **Empowerment Programs:** Launch initiatives that empower rural youth, ensuring they are recognized as distinct entities rather than mere extensions of their parents.
8. Inclusivity and Representation in Decision-making
- **Special Needs Accessibility:** Prioritize the inclusion of individuals with special needs, ensuring they have access to relevant activities and infrastructure in rural settings.
  - **Youth Representation:** Advocate for mandatory youth representation in decision-making bodies and processes, such as including young members in political campaign teams or city hall committees.
  - **Strengthening Youth Advocacy:** Address the underrepresentation of youth in high-level institutions, ensuring the concerns and needs of youth are prioritized.

## YOUTH INFRASTRUCTURE

### 5.1. Challenges

The infrastructure catering to rural youth, encompassing youth centers, community hubs, cultural and sports facilities, undeniably has its challenges. These intricacies, spanning a gamut of logistical, safety, and financial concerns, underscore the broader implications for the well-being of young people.

Firstly, in terms of facility gaps, transportation and access stand out as prime concerns. The geographical spread of these facilities often leaves certain areas underrepresented or not covered at all. Factors such as the duration of travel and sheer distance to these facilities exacerbate the inaccessibility. Furthermore, operational challenges emerge in the form of limited working hours and scarcity of human resources. It's not unusual for youth centers, especially those managed by public authorities, to open only in the evenings. Moreover, in some areas, dedicated spaces tailored for the youth are conspicuously absent. These spaces, ideal for unrestricted use, become even more pertinent given that changes in local leadership can lead to disruptions. A new municipality leader may rescind the provision of space for a youth center, opting to either relocate it to less accessible areas or discontinue support altogether.

Several innovative solutions have surfaced. Mobile youth spaces, exemplified by projects that use buses or bicycles to cover expansive regions, have found success. In some areas, mobile vans equipped with technical resources even serve as roving movie theaters, capable of reaching remote locations. Others have collaborated with school councils, offering after-school activities on demand. Even novel concepts, like electric scooters equipped with backpacks for activities, have been employed. However, legislation often poses restrictions, especially when young individuals assemble in larger numbers. Some areas necessitate special permits or are rendered inaccessible due to safety concerns post-dusk.

The age classification for youth varies, spanning from 30 to 34 years across various countries and programs. Moreover, the advent of virtual infrastructure in rural areas has facilitated connections, especially for offering psychological support and fostering discussions about rural challenges. Yet, it's not without its own set of hurdles. Internet accessibility, both from a technical and material perspective, remains inconsistent. Furthermore, the absence of youth workers, the challenge of making virtual platforms appealing, digital illiteracy, and concerns over monitoring online youth activities amplify the issues.

Safety remains a paramount concern. Many centers lack stringent protocols to ensure safe environments. Some areas grapple with the provision of safe transportation, and the venues housing youth centers often don't possess continuous security measures like surveillance systems. The close-knit nature of rural communities, where everyone knows everyone, can also be a double-edged sword, as it can foster discrimination and reinforce stereotypes. The digital realm has its concerns too, with outsiders potentially infiltrating youth-specific chat rooms.

Lastly, certain challenges are specifically inherent to these infrastructures. Funding, always a pivotal concern, is often scarce. The shortage of personnel, be it in terms of quantity or skill, further exacerbates the issues, underscoring the myriad complexities surrounding rural youth infrastructure.

### 5.2. Opportunities

In an ever-evolving society, the development, modernization, and diversification of rural youth infrastructure beckon as a pressing need. The shift towards reimagining these spaces offers numerous prospects that can be tailored to the unique requirements of young individuals.

The cornerstone of reimagining youth spaces, be it virtual or physical, lies in acknowledging the specific necessities of the demographic. Tools and resources, both educational and material, should

resonate with the age group they cater to. For instance, offering freely accessible essentials such as condoms or female hygiene products can be incredibly beneficial. Some regions have already begun initiatives where individuals can order such products online, receiving them without any cost. Ensuring a youth center is well-equipped with basic necessities, ranging from stationery to drinkable water, forms the foundation of a welcoming environment. On the virtual front, recognizing the devices predominantly used in certain areas can help tailor websites accordingly, ensuring they are user-friendly across various platforms. With sustainability at the forefront, integrating solar systems can push centers towards self-sufficiency. Complementing these with amenities like free Wi-Fi, anonymous feedback mechanisms, reading corners, and tech resources further amplifies their appeal. An interesting opportunity also lies in fostering essential life skills; imagine a youth space equipped with a kitchenette where young individuals can come together to cook, bake, and bond.

Outdoor spaces, intertwined with outreach and detached youth work, present a plethora of opportunities. Organizations in various regions have taken to the streets, distributing essential goods or spreading awareness about pertinent issues. Some regions even have dedicated volunteers, termed as "night watchers", who disseminate information about the youth sector. Leveraging existing outdoor spaces like parks, schoolyards, or sports arenas can prove beneficial. One innovative idea suggests designating two youth volunteers per rural area, equipped with bicycles or similar resources, to engage the community. Promoting youth-centric programs through posters in communal areas or by attending community meetings can also bolster awareness. Additionally, the vast outdoor spaces in rural areas present a perfect backdrop for workshops, nature-related activities, and environmental conservation initiatives. However, it's essential to be wary of the challenges, such as the weather.

On the virtual front, the potential is immense. Imagine a dedicated hotline for young individuals facing challenges or seeking someone to talk to. Utilizing platforms like Discord can foster robust communication networks among youth. Furthermore, creating localized platforms for mentorship, car-sharing, or information dissemination can significantly aid rural youth. Initiatives like movie nights or hybrid clubs, which merge the physical with the virtual, also present exciting possibilities.

Perhaps the most promising avenue lies in youth-led spaces. These spaces, curated by the youth, for the youth, inherently foster a sense of trust and autonomy. They serve as relatable hubs, echoing the ethos of inclusivity and understanding. Engaging in such endeavors paves the way for holistic learning, from understanding self-sufficiency to organizing communal events. These spaces can also act as crucibles for leadership development, fostering a sense of initiative and nurturing entrepreneurial spirits. Moreover, they can serve as a nexus, uniting various youth-driven NGOs, thereby amplifying their collective impact.

### 5.3. Dreaming on future

Envisioning an ideal rural area that boasts a modern youth infrastructure paints a picture of a vibrant, technologically advanced, and inclusive community.

Physical spaces in this stretch vast and wide, ensuring ample room for young minds to grow and explore. Cleanliness would no longer be a concern with self-cleaning amenities. The essence of accessibility would permeate throughout, ensuring all individuals, regardless of their physical abilities, can navigate and utilize the facilities with ease. These youth spaces would be equipped with the latest technology, fostering an environment of learning and adaptability. The element of autonomy would be infused, leading to self-sufficiency, with facilities like on-site medical services and legal representatives available round the clock. Creativity would find its heart in cultural infrastructures and art workshops, allowing talents to flourish. A fully-functional kitchen, quiet study zones, sound-proofed areas for video conferencing, and comprehensive bathroom facilities with showers would ensure both comfort and utility. For those inclined towards physical fitness, a gym would be accessible, both indoors and outdoors, complemented by serene garden spaces. The animal enthusiasts wouldn't be left behind, with dedicated areas for pets. With colorful spaces, proximity to schools, enhanced

transportation facilities, and a 24/7 operational timeframe, the physical realm would truly be a haven for youth. A standout feature would be a large cultural institution with a cafe, presenting employment opportunities and fostering self-reliance through its revenue model. Maker spaces, media studios, astronomy rooms, and electric vehicles would add further layers of sophistication to this paradise.

Leadership in such a community would exemplify a harmonious balance between the enthusiasm of youth and the wisdom of adults. Young individuals would spearhead initiatives, with adults providing the necessary guidance and mentorship. A collaborative approach to decision-making would ensure the infusion of fresh ideas while preserving the essence of experience. Training youngsters to coordinate teams from an early age would nurture leadership skills and ensure continuity.

Physical and emotional safety would be paramount. With facilitators on hand to guide young people through various challenges, be it addiction or feelings of isolation, the community would promote understanding and empathy. Access to round-the-clock support services, like psychologists and legal aid, would ensure the well-being of all. Prejudices would have no place, with information campaigns actively countering societal ills like racism or homophobia. Advanced security systems would protect, while the ethos would champion inclusion and acceptance. A unique “chill room” would serve as a sanctuary, equipped with amenities to soothe during moments of anxiety.

A deep sense of belonging would thread through every aspect. By leveraging technology, such as VR glasses, even those unable to participate physically would remain connected. Youth involvement in designing spaces, assuming responsibilities, and expressing themselves through art would bolster ownership. Dedicated funding streams would empower them to launch personal projects, ensuring they always feel seen, heard, and valued.

The virtual dimension would complement the physical, with dynamic platforms offering live streams of events at other centers. These platforms would be accessible across various gadgets, fostering connectivity. A nationwide hotline network would ensure continuous support. Topical forums, mentoring platforms, and specialized virtual spaces, like those on Discord, would cater to diverse interests. An innovative application, reminiscent of Tinder, would help youths find and connect with like-minded groups, share ideas, and offer advice. Lastly, the emergence of hybrid virtual youth centers, possibly accessed via VR glasses, would blur the lines between the real and virtual, creating an expansive, interconnected universe for the youth to explore.

## 5.4. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCRETE MEASURES

### 1. Steps for Creating Youth Infrastructure:

- **Youth Involvement in Schools:** Engage with young people within educational settings to understand their needs and aspirations better. Aim to strike a balance between school time and free time, ensuring young people have adequate opportunities for social interactions and participation in projects.
- **Youth Councils:** Establish a youth council or advisory board to participate in meetings at the community level, ensuring youth perspectives are always considered. Mandate that every community with a youth center also has an actively involved youth council in its decision-making processes.
- **Connection to Political and Cultural Life:** Ensure youth centers, like those in certain locations, are interconnected with broader societal spheres, such as politics or culture, deepening their relevance and impact.
- **Infrastructure Framework and Policy:** Begin by crafting a comprehensive framework for youth infrastructure. Develop policies that dictate the establishment of youth centers based on certain metrics, such as one center every 50 km or aligned with the density of young populations in particular areas.
- **Budgeting for Youth Centers:** Designate specific budgetary allocations dedicated to initiating



youth centers in every rural area.

## 2. Planning & Implementation Steps

- **Research Phase (Step 1):** Undertake extensive research on various aspects, including: Costs associated with constructing a youth center; Envisioned activities and programs; Potential management models for efficient operation.
- **Community Consultation (Step 2):** Conduct detailed consultations or research tailored for each community to gather insights and customize the approach.
- **Engaging Local Authorities (Step 3):** Strive to get local authorities on board. This may involve persuading them to invest, provide land or resources, or otherwise support the initiative, underpinned by a local policy.
- **Maintenance and Development (Step 4):** Establish processes to sustain and grow the initiative. This might include regular assessments done by young people and budgetary allocations to refresh infrastructure, programming, and equipment.

## 3. Youth Engagement:

- **Advisory Roles:** Implement a youth advisory council at the youth center level. Set up a youth advisory council at the municipality level to garner a broader range of insights.
- **Participation in Hiring:** Engage young people in the hiring process of youth workers, ensuring the chosen individuals resonate with their needs.
- **Public Policy for Accessibility:** Develop and implement public policies that guarantee access for all young people, removing barriers to entry.
- **Mobility and Reach:** Consider establishing mobile youth centers that bring activities and services to locations where young people congregate, ensuring no one is left out.

## YOUTH FUNDING

### 6.1. Challenges

Accessing funds, especially for initiatives tailored to rural youth, presents an array of challenges. Foremost among these is the glaring absence of youth representation in the decision-making processes concerning fund allocation. The notion of participative budgeting, where stakeholders are actively involved in determining how funds are used, remains underutilized. Moreover, there exists an awareness gap; many youngsters remain oblivious to the existence of these funds, or even the potential role they could play in it. This unawareness is not solely attributed to a lack of information but also stems from demographic shifts. The allure of urban spaces often draws young populations away from rural areas, resulting in an aging demographic that may not be in tune with modern funding mechanisms.

While disseminating information about funding is vital, the approach and platforms used to relay this information are equally crucial. Effective communication requires meeting the youth where they are and where they prefer to engage, whether online or offline.

However, even when this awareness is fostered, there arises the question of the sufficiency of public funds. It's a noted trend that such funds often only partially cover the required expenses. For instance, in some regions, public funds may only address half the salaries of youth workers. The project-based nature of many of these funds further complicates matters, limiting the scope and duration of youth-centered initiatives.

For some villages, particularly those skirting national borders, acquiring funds becomes an even more daunting task. Beyond logistical and security concerns, there's also the challenge of societal perception. There's often skepticism regarding the feasibility and necessity of youth projects in such areas. The viewpoint that more can be achieved in these spaces needs more proponents.

Misunderstandings or lack of clarity about fund usage further hinder initiatives. Ambiguities surrounding permissible expenses, such as equipment purchases, can deter potential beneficiaries. Organizations often grapple with the murkiness of financial rules, craving clearer communication from the start.

Additionally, securing funds for initiatives perceived as redundant by funding stakeholders is an uphill battle. Trust and familiarity play pivotal roles in community funding; those known and trusted within a community often find it easier to rally support.

Interestingly, funding interests vary across economic classes. The middle class, for instance, often shows more inclination towards supporting causes that resonate with their interests compared to the upper class.

Another dimension to this challenge is the potential reach and impact of a project. Initiatives in urban spaces naturally cater to a more extensive demographic than those in rural areas, making the latter seemingly less appealing to funders. The lack of research and statistics further muddies the waters. If the needs and numbers of rural youth remain undocumented, how can funds be effectively allocated?

Addressing immediate needs often overshadows developmental requirements. In rural areas, many young individuals grapple with covering basic necessities and may not prioritize developmental projects.

Infrastructural limitations, like inadequate digital access, further hamper these efforts. Many rural areas, especially those dominated by older demographics, don't attract the attention of internet service providers, creating a digital divide.

Building networks in rural spaces is imperative, but it comes with its own set of challenges. Identifying youth-centric platforms, be it social media or community hubs like bars and schools, is vital. Establishing trust within these communities often requires liaising with key figures, such as shopkeepers or teachers.

Lastly, the lack of tools to quantify the impact of rural youth work poses an impediment. Without tangible metrics or studies to present to potential funders, advocating for these initiatives becomes all the more difficult.

## 6.2. Opportunities

In exploring the landscape of funding and income generation for the rural youth sector, various opportunities emerge at multiple governance levels. Firstly, there are European funding sources. Alongside them, the EEA and Norway Grants offer a unique opportunity by allowing project leaders to integrate salaries into the cost structure, albeit accompanied by increased bureaucratic demands. EU programs stand out not only for their relative ease in drafting and securing funds but also for their inclusivity. While many funding avenues necessitate formal structures like associations or businesses for application, some programs permit informal groups to apply. They are designed to make the project proposal process less daunting.

Further diversifying the European funding ecosystem is the European Rural Development Fund. This initiative is not solely bound to agriculture-based projects. Instead, it provides room for more socially-oriented projects, like the establishment of youth centers in rural locales. From outside the continent, institutions such as the DAAD & GIZ, though rooted in German origins, provide scholarships and funding mechanisms. However, the intricacies and accessibility challenges associated with these funds often become barriers, especially when the expertise and resources to navigate them are scarce.

On the global front, renowned institutions like the World Bank and the Food and Agricultural Organization of the UN provide funding. Additionally, specific countries, without pinpointing any in particular, have been known to offer financial support for rural development initiatives.

Diving into the national spectrum, the availability and nature of funds vary widely from one country to another. While in some countries, the process to apply for national funds might be straightforward, the amount of support might be limited. Conversely, in other countries, both regional and national funds are plentiful and substantial.

Another European initiative, the LEADER Programme, is tailored to support rural development through its funds. Beyond governmental sources, international and national foundations play a pivotal role in financing rural youth projects. The private sector, inclusive of banks and specific companies, occasionally funds projects, but there seems to be a bias towards urban-centric endeavors, leaving rural projects in a relative lurch.

Interestingly, some funding streams emerge from personal legacies. Individuals, through their wills or testimonies, allocate parts of their wealth to causes they champion, and trust funds are sometimes established in memory of departed souls.

Marketing, too, cannot be overlooked as a potent tool. Its dual role in not only attracting donations but also facilitating the sale of goods to generate income is invaluable.

However, amidst this broad spectrum of opportunities, a glaring gap is evident. There seems to be a dearth of, or at least a lack of awareness of, funding avenues specifically tailored for projects targeting rural youth, especially those not anchored in agriculture.

As for the guiding principles that determine the allocation of these funds, priorities are diverse. There's an unmistakable emphasis on enhancing non-formal education, promoting inclusion, and fostering robust networks among the youth and those who work with them. A particular focus is also directed towards young families, emphasizing adult education and holistic family development.

The importance of mental health is gaining traction, with funds being channeled to ensure educational institutions are equipped with counselors or psychologists, recognizing the increasing mental health concerns among the youth. Efforts also extend to address burnout among young individuals.

In terms of eligible costs, the priorities are both practical and forward-thinking. Recognizing that ambitious goals like digital transformation are moot without foundational infrastructure, funds are

directed to address such fundamental needs. The push for sustainability is evident in the emphasis on green travel and supporting organizations that consciously minimize their carbon footprint. Simultaneously, there's a tangible commitment to ensure that salaries for staff are covered, families receive support to uphold their children's education, and communication initiatives, including advertisements and public relations campaigns, are adequately funded.

### 6.3. Dreaming on future

Envisioning a future where funding no longer acts as an impediment for rural youth demands a holistic reimagining of existing systems and the introduction of new ideals.

The very first transformation in this vision would be the elimination of cumbersome paperwork. While a streamlined administrative process might seem trivial, its implications are vast, especially in fostering inclusivity. Pedagogically, an optimal balance would be struck where application processes would be designed not merely for administrative purposes but also to educate the young applicants. In a model setting, youth wouldn't be bogged down by paperwork but would simply declare the essence of their projects.

One significant challenge currently faced by those from rural areas is the intimidating labyrinth of bureaucracy. Not only is this a deterrent, but many young individuals are often unprepared to navigate it due to a lack of formal training in schools regarding paperwork and bureaucracy. Ideally, the educational system would rectify this gap, equipping students with skills to handle bureaucratic procedures confidently.

Another salient feature of this envisioned funding model would be the removal of co-funding requirements. This change would mean that associations or organizations would no longer be obligated to contribute a portion of the project budget, allowing for a more equitable distribution of resources.

A foundational principle in this model would be that funds should align with the genuine needs of the youth. Recognizing that young individuals, especially from rural backgrounds, might find it challenging to discern and access funding opportunities, this system would be designed to be inherently supportive. Moreover, in a world that celebrates diversity, these funds would also cater to immigrants, refugees, and minority groups, ensuring no one is left behind.

However, while the allocation of funds is crucial, equally important is the need to define core values. The challenge here is the subjective nature of values – what might be invaluable to one might not resonate with another. But the overarching goal would be to nurture regions and communities where young people feel at home – places that are safe, nurturing, and conducive to growth.

Local dynamics play a significant role in accessing funds. In many regions, the release of local funds is contingent on the rapport with local administrative bodies or mayors. This dependency would be eliminated, ensuring a more objective and transparent allocation of resources. Moreover, to instill confidence and stability, funding would be permanent and immune to political fluctuations or failures.

Integral to this model would be the provision of guidance for young beneficiaries. Even with clear guidelines, navigating fund utilization can be daunting. Therefore, mentors or dedicated personnel would assist in ensuring funds are used effectively and within the purview of the guidelines. Additionally, recognizing the diverse linguistic landscape, guidelines would be made available in multiple languages, especially catering to minority groups.

The underlying philosophy would not be to overhaul rural regions with a surge of funds and projects. Instead, the aim would be to bridge the opportunity gap between rural and urban youth. Fundamental to this endeavor would be values like equity and inclusion.

A pragmatic approach would be adopted where fund sourcing would be aligned with the level of implementation – local challenges would be financed by local funds, national issues by national reserves, and so on. This would obviate the need for rural youth to grapple with accessing funds from overarching bodies like those at the European level.

Additionally, there would be a bolstering of youth-centric infrastructure. This would mean more rural youth workers, dedicated youth departments at municipal levels, and the establishment of youth centers. Ideally, the local administrative bodies, including mayors, would be receptive to youth-led initiatives, ensuring their concerns don't fall on deaf ears.

Concluding this vision is the essence of collaboration. Drawing from global best practices and pooling resources, the aim would be to collaboratively sculpt an "ideal" yet realistic landscape for rural youth funding.

## 6.4. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCRETE MEASURES

### 1. European Fund Allocation and Equity:

- **Rebalance Funding Distribution:** Increase the European funds budget specifically allocated for rural areas, ensuring equity between urban and rural distributions.
- **Equity-driven Budget Allocation:** Distribute budgets based on an equity principle, where rural areas get additional funding considering their developmental needs relative to urban counterparts.

### 2. Simplification and Flexibility in Funding Processes:

- **Extended Reporting Time:** Provide extended timeframes for report submissions, alleviating bureaucratic pressures on applicants.
- **Streamlined Applications:** Simplify application processes, reducing administrative barriers and making it easier for applicants, especially those from rural areas.
- **Funding Flexibility:** Ensure flexibility regarding fund utilization, allowing for adaptability based on real-time needs and unexpected results.
- **Unified Bureaucratic Process:** Strive for a unified bureaucracy process across European countries, considering the varying cultural and structural differences between nations.

### 3. Enhanced Support and Accessibility:

- **Diverse Funding Needs:** Expand fund allocations to cover a wider range of needs, including supportive tools like electronic signatures or facilitative personnel.
- **Guidance and Support:** Introduce "guiding personnel" to mentor and guide young applicants throughout the funding process.
- **Digital Tools:** Develop and maintain efficient online platforms for application submission and reporting.
- **Upfront Funding:** Offer initial funds to kick-start projects, addressing the financial constraints of many young individuals in rural areas.

### 4. Improved Engagement and Realities Awareness:

- **Youth-led Budget Management:** Encourage youth-led budget utilization and reporting processes, providing them with adequate support and guidance when necessary.
- **Inclusive Decision Making:** Ensure youth representation in decision-making processes, emphasizing the inclusion of those with prior funding process experience.
- **Ground-level Awareness:** Enhance the awareness of permanent public apparatus members about ground realities, given the frequent changes in political positions.
- **Process-Oriented Funding:** Shift the focus from results to processes in some funding categories, recognizing that meaningful change often requires time and may not align with short-term result expectations.

### 5. Local Funding and Participatory Budgeting:

- **Increase Local Fund Amounts:** Boost local fund allocations to make them more accessible to a broader audience.
- **Participatory Budgeting Initiatives:** Encourage the establishment of participatory budgets for rural areas, making budgeting more inclusive and responsive.

### 6. Comprehensive Measures for Addressing Multiple Needs:

- **Youth Worker Compensation:** Integrate compensation for youth workers into funding schemes, ensuring they can sustainably continue their work.
- **Salary Standards:** Establish a standardized base salary structure for youth workers across Europe, adjusting based on country-specific costs and experiences.

#### 7. Guidance on Funding Opportunities

- **Centralized Information Body:** Establish a centralized body to offer guidance on diverse funding opportunities available at the European, national, and local levels.

## ANNEX 2 – “From RURAL to PLURAL” session outline

The process was organized around **6 essential components** (Youth vision, Human resources, Youth work, information and counseling, Youth structures, Youth infrastructure, and Youth funding), for a youth ecosystem in **4 streams** each: challenges, opportunities, dreaming and concrete measures.

The participants were divided into 6 equal groups (one for each component), each coordinated by a facilitator and accompanied by an assistant who recorded the participants' ideas and conclusions. The discussions were developed around main themes and supported by several focus points. The notes were analyzed, processed, and incorporated into this final document by 2 rapporteurs.

### Youth VISION (legislation, policies, strategies, work plans, programs, coordination)

Topics for the 4 Interactive Discussions:

Workshop (1): <b>CHALLENGES</b> (6 sept, 15:00-16:00)	<p><b>In your rural community, which are the main obstacles young people face in getting quality life, feeling safe, and what have you personally observed or experienced regarding these challenges?</b></p> <p>Focus Points:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What are the key elements that contribute to a high-quality life for young people in rural areas?</li> <li>2. Could you share personal stories or anecdotes that shed light on the PRIMARY OBSTACLES young people face when striving to attain a high-quality life and a sense of safety in rural settings?</li> <li>3. What are the specific CHALLENGES OR CONCERNS related to safety that young people encounter in rural areas?</li> <li>4. How do these stories reflect existing local, regional, or national decisions that impact youth in these areas?</li> </ol>
Workshop (2): <b>OPPORTUNITIES</b> (6 sept, 16:30-17:30)	<p><b>How can technology, local resources, and non-traditional job roles and policy frameworks enhance life opportunities and overall well-being for young people in your rural community?</b></p> <p>Focus Points:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How can the INTEGRATION OF TECHNOLOGY in our daily lives positively impact various aspects of our community's well-being? - some examples?</li> <li>2. What advantages do LOCAL RESOURCES offer when it comes to PROMOTING NON-TRADITIONAL JOB OPPORTUNITIES and LIFE ENHANCEMENT?</li> </ol>

	<p>3. In what ways can policy frameworks be adapted for both individual life enhancement and the betterment of the local community?</p>
<p>Workshop (3): <b>DREAMING ON FUTURE</b> (6 sept, 18:00-19:00)</p>	<p><b>If you had the chance to create a perfect rural community for young people, what would life look like, what initiatives would foster inclusion, how would local decisions look like, and how would you make it a youth-friendly village?</b></p> <p>Focus Points:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How can we work towards creating AN IDEAL LIFE that fosters social inclusion within our community, especially for youth?</li> <li>2. What changes can be made to the DECISION-MAKING PROCESS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL to ensure it is more YOUTH-FRIENDLY AND ALIGNED WITH our dream scenario for the village's future?</li> <li>3. In envisioning the IDEAL YOUTH-FRIENDLY VILLAGE, what specific LOCAL DECISIONS SHOULD WE PRIORITIZE to make our dream scenario a reality?</li> </ol>
<p>Workshop (4): <b>POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS &amp; CONCRETE MEASURES</b> (7 sept, 10:30-11:30)</p>	<p><b>Based on your earlier conversations, what policy recommendations would you make to align public decisions &amp; opportunities with personal &amp; common youth aspirations and foster European values in rural settings?</b></p> <p>Focus Points:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How can policy recommendations ensure alignment with the aspirations of youth while adhering to European values?</li> <li>2. What PRACTICAL ACTIONS should be incorporated into policy recommendations to bridge the gap between youth aspirations and public decisions?</li> </ol>

## HUMAN RESOURCES for youth (youth workers, volunteers and paid personnel, managers, facilitators, experts, policy makers)

Topics for the 4 Interactive Discussions:

<p>Workshop (1): <b>CHALLENGES</b> (6 sept, 15:00-16:00)</p>	<p><b>What difficulties do youth workers and other personnel experience when working with young people in rural areas, and how accessible are non-formal educational opportunities? Do you think of any challenges in youth workers' (other personnel) recruitment and retention?</b></p> <p>Focus Points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenges in working with rural youth (because of the rural context / because of the beneficiary who is from a rural area/ because the youth worker is not prepared enough to work with young people from rural area)</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss about the difference between youth workers who are part of the community and detached youth workers;</li> <li>• Accessibility of non-formal educational activities for rural youth, in the rural area, because of recruitment &amp; retention of youth workers in rural area</li> </ul>
<p>Workshop (2): <b>OPPORTUNITIES</b> (6 sept, 16:30-17:30)</p>	<p><b>What unique assets do rural areas have that could help youth workers? How can digital technology and local resources be harnessed to enhance educational/ learning and developmental opportunities for rural youth and youth workers?</b></p> <p>Focus Points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify relevant unique assets of rural areas</li> <li>• Importance of digital technology in developing youth work</li> <li>• Identify useful local resources for development opportunities for rural youth and youth workers</li> <li>• Young people who, from beneficiaries, become youth workers themselves</li> </ul>
<p>Workshop (3): <b>DREAMING ON FUTURE</b> (6 sept, 18:00-19:00)</p>	<p><b>In a dream scenario where every rural youth has access to both formal and non-formal education, what roles would youth workers, volunteers, and experts play? How would youth competencies be incorporated into this ideal landscape?</b></p> <p>Focus Points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dream Scenario</li> <li>• Youth workers/ volunteers/ experts etc. Roles</li> <li>• Importance of competencies development</li> <li>• Non-formal Education</li> <li>• Community support for youth workers/ volunteers</li> </ul>
<p>Workshop (4): <b>POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS &amp; CONCRETE MEASURES</b> (7 sept, 10:30-11:30)</p>	<p><b>What actions should be taken to make sure that human resources like youth workers and the whole community of practice in rural areas effectively meet the needs of youth? What types of programs would you recommend for competencies development, in order to be adapted for rural youth learning processes?</b></p> <p>Focus Points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rural Youth Learning Needs that could be covered (met)</li> <li>• Indicate the Action Steps to make sure that human resources effectively meet the needs of youth</li> <li>• Indicate Program Types (e.g. human rights education, social justice programs, digitalization etc.)</li> </ul>

**Youth WORK, youth INFORMATION, COUNSELING and OTHER SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES (including projects and trainings to increase the participation of the young people in community life and to develop youth organizations capacity building)**

Topics for the 4 Interactive Discussions:

<p>Workshop (1): <b>CHALLENGES</b> (6 sept, 15:00-16:00)</p>	<p><b>What challenges do rural youth face in getting quality youth work, information, and counseling services? How aware are they about their rights and opportunities for growth, and what specific issues do marginalized groups encounter?</b></p> <p>Focus Points:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What are the key elements which help youth work, information and counseling services in getting high quality?</li> <li>2. What are the SPECIFIC CHALLENGES OR CONCERNS related to youth work encountered in rural areas?</li> <li>3. What CHALLENGES do youth from rural areas face in accessing their rights and having growth opportunities?</li> <li>4. In rural areas, what specific issues/ challenges do marginalized youth face?</li> </ol>
<p>Workshop (2): <b>OPPORTUNITIES</b> (6 sept, 16:30-17:30)</p>	<p><b>What existing or potential opportunities, like cultural programs or competence-building workshops, could improve youth work in your community? How can family/ community members or existing platforms contribute more effectively in personal &amp; professional development of young people?</b></p> <p>Focus Points:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What existing or potential opportunities (for competence-building), could improve youth work in your community?</li> <li>2. Thinking of youth information and counseling, what are the opportunities family/ community members or existing online/offline platforms offer in rural areas?</li> </ol>
<p>Workshop (3): <b>DREAMING ON FUTURE</b> (6 sept, 18:00-19:00)</p>	<p><b>Imagine a future where rural youth are well-rounded individuals. What would the role of an effective information system be, and how would counseling services function to offer full support?</b></p> <p>Focus Points:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Imagine an ideal life (personally, professionally, socially) for youths in rural areas. What does this look like for young people in rural areas?</li> <li>2. How are the services for youth (information &amp; counseling) working at their full potential?</li> </ol>

	<p>3. Considering services for youth offer full support for young people in rural areas, how is, as a consequence, youth social responsibility improved (including from an active citizenship's perspective - e.g. volunteering)?</p>
<p>Workshop (4): <b>POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS &amp; CONCRETE MEASURES</b> (7 sept, 10:00-11:30)</p>	<p><b>What specific decisions are needed to create a system that fully integrates youth work, information, and counseling to meet the needs of rural youth? How can programs foster personal, professional and social development of rural youth? What about human rights and encourage youth to give back to their community?</b></p> <p>Focus Points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrated System</li> <li>• Policy Decisions</li> <li>• Personal, Professional and Social development (from the perspective of fostering human rights and encourage youth to give back to their community - e.g. practicing volunteering)</li> </ul> <p>1. How can policy recommendations ensure an integrated system which helps youth work, information and counseling from rural areas?</p> <p>3. What practical actions should be incorporated into policy recommendations to bridge the gap between youth aspirations (personally, professionally, socially developments) and public decisions, from the perspective of fostering human rights and encouraging youth to give back to their community - e.g. practicing volunteering?</p>

**Youth STRUCTURES (youth NGOs, authorities and public institutions, resource centres, youth councils, consultative and deliberative bodies, clubs, informal groups, National Youth Councils, youth movements)**

Topics for the 4 Interactive Discussions:

<p>Workshop (1): <b>CHALLENGES</b> (6 sept, 15:00-16:00)</p>	<p><b>What challenges do rural youth face in communication and cooperation with authorities? What challenges existing youth structures like NGOs, informal groups and youth councils face when working in rural areas/ with rural youth? Are there any marginalized groups that struggle more with public decisions?</b></p> <p>Focus Points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth-Authority Communication Gap</li> <li>• Capacity challenges of the youth structures</li> <li>• Representation challenges of all youth voices</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marginalized Groups (both as potential contributors to the decision-making processes and as beneficiaries of public decisions)</li> </ul>
<p>Workshop (2): <b>OPPORTUNITIES</b> (6 sept, 16:30-17:30)</p>	<p><b>What opportunities can enhance the dialogue between youth structures and rural youth? Are there untapped resources or platforms that could increase capacity building of youth structures, visibility for rural youth initiatives and empower rural youth?</b></p> <p>Focus Points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance Dialogue</li> <li>• Untapped Resources or Platforms</li> <li>• How to give visibility to rural youth initiatives</li> <li>• Rural Youth Empowerment</li> </ul>
<p>Workshop (3): <b>DREAMING ON FUTURE</b> (6 sept, 18:00-19:00)</p>	<p><b>Imagine a future with ongoing, constructive dialogue between rural youth, their structures and public authorities. What elements are crucial for this, how could rural youth impact broader policies, and what would an inclusive, participatory environment look like?</b></p> <p>Focus Points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crucial elements of a Constructive Dialogue</li> <li>• Broader Policies (other than youth policies or other than local policies)</li> <li>• Inclusive Environment for cooperation</li> <li>• Active Participation of all rural youth</li> </ul>
<p>Workshop (4): <b>POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS &amp; CONCRETE MEASURES</b> (7 sept, 10:30-11:30)</p>	<p><b>Based on identified challenges and opportunities, what decisions could better align youth structures and public authorities with rural youth needs? How can rural youth become equal stakeholders and how can we safeguard their rights and interests?</b></p> <p>Focus Points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Align Structures with youth needs</li> <li>• Equal Stakeholders in decision-making processes</li> <li>• Safeguard participation rights through effective monitoring</li> </ul>

**Youth INFRASTRUCTURE (youth centres, friendly spaces to engage young people in a comfortable manner - physical, mobile or virtual)**

Topics for the 4 Interactive Discussions:

	<p><b>What challenges do you see in rural youth infrastructure (like youth centres, community centres, cultural or sports facilities), including gaps in types of facilities and their impact on the safety and well-being of young people?</b></p>
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<p>Workshop (1): <b>CHALLENGES</b> (6 sept, 15:00-16:00)</p>	<p>Focus Points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facility Gaps (existence/lack of youth infrastructures - youth centres, community centres, cultural or sports facilities; how youth friendly they are)</li> <li>• Youth Safety (physical and emotional safety) and well-being</li> <li>• Specific challenges (related to youth infrastructure) for remote rural areas</li> </ul>
<p>Workshop (2): <b>OPPORTUNITIES</b> (6 sept, 16:30-17:30)</p>	<p><b>What opportunities exist to develop, modernize and diversify rural youth infrastructure, including outdoor and virtual spaces? What about youth-led youth spaces?</b></p> <p>Focus Points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development/ Modernization/ Diversification of spaces</li> <li>• Outdoor spaces including outreach &amp; detached youth work and information</li> <li>• Virtual Possibilities</li> <li>• Opportunities of youth-led youth spaces</li> </ul>
<p>Workshop (3): <b>DREAMING ON FUTURE</b> (6 sept, 18:00-19:00)</p>	<p><b>Imagine an ideal rural area with modern youth infrastructure. What elements would it include in terms of physical spaces (indoor/outdoor), leadership, safety &amp; belonging, and how could virtual platforms complement these?</b></p> <p>Focus Points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical Spaces</li> <li>• Leadership (authority-led/ co-management/ youth-led)</li> <li>• Physical and emotional safety (including measures)</li> <li>• Sense of belonging</li> <li>• Virtual Platforms</li> </ul>
<p>Workshop (4): <b>POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS &amp; CONCRETE MEASURES</b> (7 sept, 10:30-11:30)</p>	<p><b>Based on what we've discussed, what decisions should be taken for creating a modern, diverse, and safe youth infrastructure in rural areas, and how should planning &amp; running the youth infrastructure be organized? How should youth be involved in these processes?</b></p> <p>Focus Points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Steps for creating a modern, diverse, and safe youth infrastructure in rural areas</li> <li>• Planning process &amp; Implementation Steps</li> <li>• Youth involvement</li> </ul>

## Youth FUNDING (public, private, crowdfunding / based on competition, direct funding or participatory budget)

Topics for the 4 Interactive Discussions:

<p>Workshop (1): <b>CHALLENGES</b> (6 sept, 15:00-16:00)</p>	<p><b>What are the challenges in accessing different types of funding (like public, private, or crowdfunding) or in generating income? Do local/ regional/ national or European/ international funding programs address enough the rural youth sector? Do eventual information and access gaps affect the rural youth sector?</b></p> <p>Focus Points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying barriers in accessing different types of funding</li> <li>• Identifying the special needs and priorities of rural youth and the rural youth sector, that are not covered through different types of funding (local/ regional/ national or European/ international funding programs)</li> <li>• Information and accessibility gaps or limitations, related to funding opportunities</li> </ul>
<p>Workshop (2): <b>OPPORTUNITIES</b> (6 sept, 16:30-17:30)</p>	<p><b>What type of funding/ income generating opportunities exist for the rural youth sector at local/ regional/ national/ European level and what do they fund concretely?</b></p> <p>Focus Points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify both funding opportunities (e.g. grants, participatory budgeting etc.) and income generating mechanisms (e.g. crowdfunding, social entrepreneurship, donations etc.), for supporting the development of the youth sector (young people, youth NGOs, youth workers, youth spaces etc.)</li> <li>• Identify eligible costs of funding programs (human resource, activity, infrastructure, policies etc.) and eligible priorities (e.g. youth employment, inclusion and diversity, climate, non-formal education etc.)</li> </ul>
<p>Workshop (3): <b>DREAMING ON FUTURE</b> (6 sept, 18:00-19:00)</p>	<p><b>Imagine a future where funding is no longer a barrier for rural youth. How would the ideal funding program look like?</b></p> <p>Focus Points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does a youth-friendly funding program look like for rural youth structures (youth NGOs and informal groups)</li> <li>• Core values of the program</li> <li>• Expected results</li> <li>• Where does the money come from? (public authority, private entity, the community, compilation of donors etc.)</li> <li>• How does the relation between the grant giver and the beneficiary look like?</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Etc.</li> </ul>
<p>Workshop (4): <b>POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS &amp; CONCRETE MEASURES</b> (7 sept, 10:30-11:30)</p>	<p><b>What decisions and strategies would you recommend for funding, including local, national, and European sources, to be made more accessible and sustainable to rural youth? What innovative ways could better target the youth sector's needs and enhance funding efficiency?</b></p> <p>Focus Points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessible Funding (how easily can money be obtained, spent and justified/reported)</li> <li>• Sustainable Funding (types of funding similar to operational grants; recurrency in grants/ long-term funding; funding diversification)</li> <li>• Innovation in targeting youth sector's needs</li> <li>• Funding Efficiency (the impact of spending the money)</li> </ul>

# SCALING THE EUROPEAN YOUTH VILLAGE PROGRAMME FROM NATIONAL TO EUROPEAN LEVEL

## The European Youth Village - a tool for developing the European Rural Youth Ecosystem

The European Youth Village program, scaled from national (Romania) to European level, as envisioned by the participants and recommended to the Program's Governance, seeks to be more than just a title or an event. It aims to be a transformative experience, shaping the lives of rural youths, and consequently, the future of Europe.

In their vision, the European Youth Village should be a sustainable, inclusive, and collaborative initiative designed to foster best practices in youth development. It should aim to redefine the perception of rural areas by challenging stereotypes and positioning them as hubs of innovation. By leveraging existing platforms, emphasizing diversity, and creating safe spaces for collaboration, the program should offer a scalable model for community development that can inspire regions throughout Europe.

### KEY FEATURES envisioned

- **Clear Roadmap:** A straightforward guide that lays out the objectives, core values, and implementation steps for the program, ensuring consistency and clarity in its approach.
- **Inclusive Participation:** Emphasizing the importance of diversity and minority representation, ensuring that all voices are heard, and every young person feels included.
- **Collaboration:** Encouraging villages to collaborate, thereby promoting unity and shared development goals, which can be especially beneficial for smaller or standalone entities.
- **Sustainability:** Previous titleholders remain actively engaged, mentoring newer participants, ensuring continuity and the sharing of best practices.
- **Diverse Representation:** Recognizing the differences and shared values across the European landscape, and integrating them into the program, ensuring it remains relevant and dynamic.
- **Challenge Stereotypes:** Active efforts to portray rural areas as centers of creativity, innovation, and change.
- **Resource Utilization:** Leveraging existing platforms and local practices to enhance the program's efficiency and reach.
- **Mentorship:** Titleholding villages guiding and assisting neighboring regions, creating a ripple effect of positive change.
- **Democratic Practices:** Keeping the program transparent, fair, and synergistic with local



authorities and regulations.

- **Advisory Group:** Including representatives from the rural youth to keep the program connected, relevant, and continuously evolving.

The European Youth Village, as shaped by the participating voices, presents a vision of a unified Europe, where the dynamism of youth melds seamlessly with the wisdom of tradition. This program, if implemented effectively, has the potential not only to bring about local transformations but also to reshape the very fabric of European community interactions and growth.

The European Youth Village program, as envisioned through participant feedback, is rooted in the empowerment of youth, leveraging several critical tools and methods for meaningful change at the European scale.

The program is grounded in bolstering youth confidence, facilitating effective communication, establishing mentorship networks, and ensuring sustainability through community engagement. Recognizing the challenges of youth migration and the potential erosion of continuity, the program seeks to foster a sense of belonging and purpose among its participants.

## KEY TOOLS AND METHODS desired

- **Community Organizing:** Central to the program is the empowerment of youth to articulate and advocate for their needs and visions. Simplified access to information, public speaking opportunities, and the creation of "twin villages" fosters a culture of mutual support and shared growth.
- **Participatory Rural Planning and Advocacy:** Specialized training, such as advocacy workshops, are pivotal. By equipping youth with the knowledge and skills to communicate with NGOs and local authorities, the program ensures their voices resonate at policy-making levels.
- **Training and workshops:** Essential to the initiative's success is continuous learning. This might manifest as internships with NGOs, tailored mentoring programs, and identifying and nurturing potential young leaders within communities.
- **Public-Private Partnerships:** Collaboration with local NGOs and authorities ensures grassroots representation and program implementation. An overarching coordinating entity can weave together local initiatives into a more extensive network, offering resources, support, and ensuring standardization of objectives and ethos.
- **Financial Backing:** For the program to materialize, financial support is essential. This can cater to workshops, secure spaces, materials, and potentially, the appointment of coordinators at various levels.
- **Retention Efforts:** Addressing the potential challenge of youth migration, initiatives that incentivize staying or returning, such as job opportunities, community projects, or entrepreneurship support, can ensure program continuity.
- **Mentorship:** Building on the concept of "twin villages", mentorship becomes crucial. Whether it's pairing villages for mutual support or establishing internships and collaborations, mentorship is a key driver of the program's success.

The European Youth Village program paints a vision of a united Europe where the rural youth are not just participants but leaders and changemakers. Through community organizing, participatory planning, education, and public-private partnerships, this initiative holds the potential to transform rural landscapes, ensuring that they remain vibrant, innovative, and integral to the European narrative.

The European Youth Village program, when scaled to a European level, necessitates deep-rooted involvement from both youth and public authorities. Bridging the gap between these two entities can yield synergies that drive meaningful change in communities.

## Proposed ROADMAP

- **Grassroots Mobilization:** Identify and rally individuals with shared passions. By pooling collective strengths, there's an immediate consolidation of efforts towards a common goal. Ensuring everyone is on the same page with mutual goals and values will be paramount.
- **Infrastructure:** Establish a clear internal structure for youth groups. An organized structure can streamline efforts, delegate responsibilities, and ensure efficient operations.
- **Engagement Through Activities:** Foster a sense of community by hosting events, projects, or service activities. Such events can act as a focal point for interaction between different stakeholders, promoting active involvement.
- **Empowering with Knowledge:** Equip the community, especially the youth, with comprehensive knowledge about how to engage with public authorities. A well-informed community is more likely to take proactive steps.
- **Two-way Communication:** Bridge the communication gap between youth and policymakers. Regular dialogues, open forums, and platforms where both parties can interact and understand each other's perspectives are essential.
- **Youth Councils:** Establish councils that provide a structured platform for youth to convey their concerns, aspirations, and ideas directly to decision-makers. This not only amplifies their voice but ensures their concerns are addressed at the highest levels.
- **Advocacy and Campaigns:** Encourage and support youth-driven advocacy campaigns. Such initiatives bring their concerns to the forefront and can catalyze necessary changes within communities.
- **Spaces for Expression:** Designate public spaces or hubs where community members can gather, collaborate, and voice their needs. Such spaces act as constant reminders of evolving community requirements.
- **Empowerment through Expertise:** Engage experts or mentors who can guide the youth, honing their skills, and ensuring their enthusiasm is directed towards productive endeavors. This strengthens the foundation of their initiatives.
- **Political Inclusion:** Highlight the importance and impact of youth involvement in politics. By showcasing politics as an arena for all ages, the youth can be motivated to participate more actively, driving real change in their communities.

In essence, the European Youth Village program, as defined by participants, is about fostering an ecosystem where the youth feel empowered, are well-informed, and can actively collaborate with public authorities. Through structured involvement, continuous dialogue, and a deep understanding of community needs, a harmonious balance can be achieved, driving meaningful and sustainable development at a European level.

To enhance the European Youth Village program's reach and impact on rural youth, equipping them with knowledge about available resources and preparing them for strategic action is vital.

## SYNTHESIZED VISION based on the feedback

- **Social Media Outreach:** Utilizing platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to disseminate

information is critical given their vast reach among the youth. Regular posts, interactive stories, and engaging content can create a consistent flow of information.

- **Public Transport Advertisements:** Leveraging spaces on buses or trams for information panels ensures a captive audience. It also serves as a frequent reminder about the program and its resources.
- **Simplified Content:** Adopting the KISS (Keep It Simple, Stupid) approach ensures that information is not just accessible but also easily understood. Infographics, short videos, and straightforward language can be employed.
- **Designated Contact Points:** Having designated 'resource persons' or 'youth ambassadors' provides a human touch. These individuals can answer queries, guide the youth, and serve as a bridge between the program and its beneficiaries.
- **Community Engagements:** Hosting town hall meetings, interactive sessions, or community gatherings strengthens the program's grassroots connection. Direct interactions can clarify doubts, gather feedback, and foster a sense of ownership among the youth.
- **School-based Initiatives:** Schools play a pivotal role in the lives of the youth. Establishing 'info-points' or resource corners in schools ensures consistent access to information. Collaborating with educators to incorporate non-formal educational sessions or activities related to the program can deepen understanding.
- **Hands-on Learning:** Dedicated spaces for experiential learning can be invaluable. Through practical exercises, simulations, or role-playing, the youth can grasp the real-world application of resources and strategies.
- **Unconventional Awareness Campaigns:** Eye-catching initiatives like flash mobs, street plays, or pop-up events can generate buzz and interest. Such methods are not just informative but are also aligned with the vibrancy of youth culture.
- **Feedback Mechanism:** Ensuring there's a system in place for the youth to provide feedback on the resources and their accessibility can help refine the program continually. This iterative approach ensures the program evolves in line with the needs of its audience.

The European Youth Village program, as envisioned by participants, is poised to be an agile, responsive, and youth-centric initiative. With a strong emphasis on awareness and preparation, the program can empower rural youth, ensuring they are not just beneficiaries but also active contributors to its growth and evolution.

The European Youth Village program, scaled to a pan-European level, promises transformative impacts on the youth and their communities.

## ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND THE ENVISIONED FUNCTIONAL ECOSYSTEM

- **Increased Youth Participation:** A significant rise in youth participation, both quantitatively and qualitatively, indicates a successful youth-centric model. This encompasses involvement in community projects, volunteering, leadership roles, and active collaboration with stakeholders.
- **Inter-Village Collaborations:** Witnessing villages not only thriving independently but also actively partnering with neighboring villages paints a picture of regional growth. Exchange programs, shared resources, and mutual mentorship can lead to widespread rural development.
- **Demographic Reversal:** A successful program might be able to reverse the urban migration trend. If younger families return to their roots, it points towards the villages offering both socio-economic advantages and a sense of belonging. Key metrics to consider include average age, the educational background of returnees, and the duration of their urban stints.

- **Comprehensive Amenities:** The availability of essential infrastructures, like quality schools and healthcare centers, combined with recreational and community spaces, ensures a holistic living environment. This comprehensive growth ensures that rural life isn't just about sustenance but also about thriving.
- **Emotional Well-being:** Annual or bi-annual surveys gauging happiness, satisfaction, and overall mental well-being can provide qualitative insights. A successful program would witness increasing contentment levels, which can be further fine-tuned by addressing specific community concerns.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Recognizing that the concept of a 'village' and the challenges faced can differ across Europe, the program should prioritize cultural understanding. Tailoring interventions to regional nuances ensure that the program remains relevant and effective.
- **Financial Boost:** A vibrant village ecosystem can lead to economic revitalization. From increased tourism, artisanal businesses to local innovation hubs, the potential for diverse revenue streams is vast. This not only benefits the community but can also contribute significantly to regional and national economies.
- **Enhanced Perception:** Over time, the program can reshape how villages and rural life are perceived. From being seen as places in decline, villages can be reimagined as hubs of culture, innovation, and sustainable living.
- **State Benefits:** On a macro scale, the results are manifold. States would witness a happier, more engaged youth demographic, potentially reduced unemployment rates, and a revitalized rural economy. Additionally, the potential for international recognition and partnerships can place these regions on the global map.

The European Youth Village program isn't just a rural rejuvenation initiative; it's a movement. A movement that recognizes the potential of the youth, the charm and resourcefulness of villages, and the need for a holistic, sustainable future. Through its multifaceted outcomes, it promises to breathe life back into the heartbeats of Europe – its villages.

# A COMPREHENSIVE PORTRAIT of the European Youth Village program, as shaped by the participants who answered the survey

## I. Program Fundamentals

### Primary Objectives:

- Encourage youth engagement in civic life.
- Create opportunities for young people from rural areas in their villages.
- Enhance access to education and vocational training.

### Guiding Principles:

- Foster active youth participation in community life.
- Emphasize personal, professional, and social development of youth.
- Design a flexible program tailored to local needs.

### Envisioned Impact:

- Amplify rural youth's role in local, national, and European political decisions.
- Boost civic engagement and youth's active involvement in community life.
- Forge effective partnerships between rural communities, local authorities, informal youth groups, and NGOs.

### Anticipated Local Benefits:

- Strengthen community cohesion.
- Deliver training and educational opportunities for youth.
- Empower youth autonomy and reinforce local participatory governance.

## II. Application for the European Youth Village Title

### Expected Benefits from the Title:

- Augment visibility on both national and international platforms.
- Attract funding and investments.
- Bolster community identity and develop youth infrastructure.

### Key Preliminary Steps:

- Conduct thorough data collection and research on youth needs.
- Organize workshops and public consultations.
- Identify and engage key stakeholders.

### Essential Stakeholders:

- Youth NGOs and associations.
- Local and county administrations.
- International partners and European organizations.

### Priority Activities for Title Holders:

- Offer education and vocational training.
- Enhance civic participation, democracy, and leadership.
- Promote health and well-being of youth.

### Application & Evaluation Process:

- Participatory, incorporating consultations and public votes.
- Simplified, minimizing bureaucracy.

**Optimal Timeframe for Implementation:**

- 1-2 years after granting the title.

### III. Relationship with the Program's Governance

**Governance Involvement:**

- Moderate, providing guidance and support.
- Collaborative, sharing responsibilities with the community.

**Mentorship Needs:**

- Tailored mentorship based on the needs of the management team.
- Provision of seminars and workshops.

**Interactions with Other European Youth Villages:**

- Viewed as a significant advantage.
- Offers an excellent opportunity for the exchange of best practices.

### IV. Ambassadors of the Program

**Recommendation Level:**

- Highly recommended for other European communities.

**Interest in Becoming Program Ambassadors:**

- High interest evident among a considerable percentage of respondents.

Overall, the European Youth Village program, as visualized by the participants emphasizes youth engagement, education, and community cohesion. It aims to amplify the voice of rural youth in decision-making processes and foster partnerships that can address common challenges.

## Annex 1 - FOCUS GROUP FULL REPORT

At the first edition of the European Rural Youth Summit, following the consultations titled "From Rural to Plural", the vision, mission, and overall objective for the European Youth Village program were outlined for the development of the Rural Youth Ecosystem as follows:

- The VISION of the EUROPEAN YOUTH VILLAGE Program is: "We dream of a countryside where every young person can shine! We want you to have all the tools and chances you need, in a world that listens to your voice. Together, let's make rural Europe a cool, caring, and creative space for all!"
- The MISSION of the EUROPEAN YOUTH VILLAGE Program is to be a strategic program aiming to develop the rural youth ecosystem.
- The GENERAL OBJECTIVE of the European Youth Village Program is: "Our big goal is simple: make every village a place where young people can learn, grow, lead, and be happy!"

Aiming to scale the program from the national level in Romania to the European level, and starting from the newly outlined vision, mission, and general objective, the 43 participants from countries other than Romania shared their views on how the European Youth Village program can effectively develop a sustainable and empowering youth ecosystem in rural areas, fulfilling its specific objectives through strategic tools and partnerships, and what the expected outcomes are for the youth and public authorities involved.

### HOW CAN THE PROGRAM DEVELOP BEST PRACTICES IN THE FIELD OF YOUTH AND OFFER A POSITIVE MODEL OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZING, DEVELOPMENT AND BUILDING THAT CAN BE SCALED AT EUROPEAN LEVELS

To ensure that the European Youth Village program stands out as a beacon for best practices in youth development, several recommendations can be made.

Firstly, it's imperative to outline a clear roadmap. Essentially, there should be a straightforward to-do list detailing how to kick off the program and the subsequent steps to follow. Accompanying this, a guideline for inclusive participation is paramount. Such a guideline would articulate the program's core values, elucidating on how to implement them, notably emphasizing the importance of fostering diversity and ensuring minority groups feel embraced.

Moreover, a collaborative approach might prove beneficial. One might consider allowing neighboring villages to join forces and co-apply for the program's title. This collaborative stance would not only bolster their chances but also promote harmony between local leaders, especially in regions where villages are standalone entities, unlike larger communal setups, potentially making it challenging for smaller villages to apply independently.

Longevity and continuity are keys. To ensure the program remains vibrant and effective, sustainability measures should be introduced. Villages that have previously been in the spotlight by holding the title should not fade into oblivion; rather, they should maintain an

active role. Concurrently, a comprehensive policy that facilitates the participation of minorities and refugees needs to be in place.

To further enhance the program's reach and impact, dedicated spaces for youth workers within the program can be set up. Also, the involvement of young families could provide a fresh perspective and invigorate the program.

Understanding the diverse European landscape is also pivotal. The program should actively seek to pinpoint the differences and shared values among participating countries. Empowering rural youth, giving them a robust platform to voice their ideas and concerns, can lead to more informed decisions.

It's essential to challenge stereotypes and showcase rural areas as hubs of innovation. By actively supporting and championing the creativity of rural youth, a narrative shift can be achieved. In situations where villages wish to retain their title, the establishment of an informal youth council might prove beneficial, offering insights and fresh perspectives.

Utilizing existing resources can be advantageous. Platforms like "Europe Goes Local" might be leveraged, or a dive into similar local-level practices can be made to integrate them with the program. Safe spaces where rural youth can congregate, collaborate, and work should be established, fostering a sense of community and belonging.

When a village earns the program's title, it should not only bask in its glory but also serve as a mentor, a guiding light for neighboring regions. This domino effect can trigger widespread improvements, even at a national scale.

At its core, the program should continually evolve, focusing on unveiling new opportunities for rural youth. Simultaneously, there should be a pronounced emphasis on supporting youth work. As with all initiatives of this magnitude, adhering to democratic practices and maintaining a synergistic relationship with local authorities is crucial.

Lastly, to ensure the program remains grounded and connected to its roots, the formation of an advisory group, comprising representatives from the rural youth, might be considered. This would ensure that the program remains relevant, dynamic, and truly representative of the youth it seeks to serve.

## WHAT TOOLS, SUCH AS COMMUNITY ORGANIZING, PARTICIPATORY RURAL PLANNING (INCLUDING ADVOCACY), EDUCATION, AND PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS, WILL BE MOST EFFECTIVE IN ACHIEVING THESE SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES AND HOW

To enhance the effectiveness of the European Youth Village program, a series of tools and approaches are recommended, all designed to address specific needs and objectives.

Foremost, the youth should be equipped with essential tools that bolster their confidence and ability to work in group settings. It's vital that they feel at ease expressing their opinions in public forums. Simplifying their access to pertinent information and opportunities can significantly aid in achieving this.

Building on the concept of "twin cities", the idea of "twin villages" can be introduced. These would be villages from various European locales paired together for mutual support and mentorship. But the empowerment of local youth doesn't stop at just creating connections. Community organizers and other NGOs can play pivotal roles, especially by providing specialized training. For instance, workshops on advocacy tailored for youth can



offer them insights into effective communication with NGOs and authorities. However, to facilitate such workshops, financial backing is crucial, specifically for securing spaces and the requisite materials. Alongside, the appointment of a coordinator, be it part-time or full-time, can further streamline and bolster this process.

Collaboration is another cornerstone of this endeavor. Engaging local authorities can prove immensely beneficial, not just for the present but for influencing regional policies in the long run. To effectively implement and represent the program at the grassroots level, partnering with a local NGO or group is advisable. This ensures that the program's ethos and objectives are well-anchored within the community.

However, while having individual NGOs or groups at the local level is a step in the right direction, there's an evident need for a larger coordinating entity. This overarching body could knit together these local initiatives, forming a cohesive network that offers resources and support. A challenge that might arise in this context is the potential exodus of young people from these villages. Efforts should be made to encourage them to stay or return, ensuring continuity and sustainability.

Mentorship can't be stressed enough. A mentoring program tailored for the village milieu can usher in invaluable resources and expertise. Drawing inspiration from successful domestic models, internships with NGOs can be integrated into the program. This will not only offer the youth a chance to acquire diverse skills but can also foster collaboration between different projects and entities under the European Youth Village umbrella.

Lastly, to ensure that the program remains dynamic and truly reflective of the youth's aspirations, efforts should be made to identify young leaders or potential leaders within the community. These budding changemakers can be nurtured through targeted training, ensuring a bright future for both the program and the villages it serves.

## WHAT STEPS CAN BE TAKEN TO INCREASE THE INVOLVEMENT OF YOUTH AND PUBLIC AUTHORITIES IN ADDRESSING COMMUNITY NEEDS

For the European Youth Village program to truly resonate and make an impact, it's crucial to increase both youth and public authorities' involvement in addressing community needs. Here's a synthesized narrative on how this can be achieved:

Identifying individuals with similar passions and objectives is the first step. By forming a group dedicated to connecting with the broader community, efforts can be aligned. Within this collective, establishing clear rules and setting mutual goals ensures a unified direction. Further anchoring this effort is the need to define the community's social profit and capital, effectively highlighting what holds intrinsic value for its members.

To streamline this engagement and make it more efficient, creating an internal structure is recommended. This not only lends clarity but also helps in organizing efforts effectively. And, while the structure is essential, what truly brings a community together are the events, projects, and activities that encourage participation. By involving various stakeholders, from individuals to organizations, and by hosting events or initiating service projects, a vibrant interaction within the community is promoted.

However, all these efforts would be in vain if the community remains in the dark about how to engage with public authorities. Providing clear, simple, and accessible information about this interaction process ensures everyone is well-equipped to engage proactively.

But interaction shouldn't be one-sided. There's an evident distance between the youth and policymakers, and bridging this gap is vital. Regular and open communication channels can facilitate this, ensuring the youth's needs are not just heard but addressed. This two-way dialogue acts as an invaluable feedback mechanism.

One of the tangible ways to solidify this communication is by organizing youth councils. Such platforms effectively channel the concerns, ideas, and aspirations of the youth straight to the decision-makers. Beyond just voicing concerns, the youth should be made aware that politics isn't an arena reserved for the older generation. They need to be shown that their involvement in politics can truly usher in change in their community.

Moreover, advocacy campaigns spearheaded by the youth amplify their concerns and drive community change. These campaigns, coupled with designated public spaces or spots for community members to voice their needs, ensure that the evolving requirements of the community are always in focus.

Lastly, the youth's enthusiasm and passion, while commendable, need direction. Bringing in experts who can nurture their team spirit and ensure they have a conducive environment to work in is essential. This not only bolsters their confidence but also ensures that their efforts are channeled effectively and efficiently.

## HOW CAN THE PROGRAM MAKE RURAL YOUTH MORE AWARE OF THE RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO THEM AND PREPARED FOR STRATEGIC ACTION

To amplify the effectiveness of the European Youth Village program and ensure the rural youth is both well-informed and prepared for strategic action, a few methodologies are suggested.

First and foremost, enhancing visibility on social media is crucial. With the majority of the youth actively engaged on various platforms, this provides an immediate and impactful way to reach out. Moreover, by placing information panels on public transportation, the program can seamlessly integrate itself into the daily life of the youth, keeping them informed even when they are on the move.

Yet, the way this information is presented is just as important as its visibility. It's essential to simplify the content to its most basic form, ensuring that complex jargon and over-complicated details don't deter the youth from understanding the resources at their disposal. This "Keep It Simple, Stupid" approach ensures clarity and comprehensibility.

Another significant step is establishing specific points of contact. Identifying and promoting individuals or 'resource people' who can be approached for more detailed information ensures that the youth always has a go-to person for any queries or concerns.

However, while digital mediums and static information points are valuable, nothing compares to personal outreach. Taking the effort to engage with the youth of the villages in person, through community meetings, gatherings, or events, fosters a direct and personal connection.

In tandem with this, schools can act as pivotal hubs of information dissemination. Creating easily accessible, visually rich 'info-points' within educational institutions offers the youth a direct glimpse into the available resources. Moreover, dedicated spaces within schools, ideally rooms designated for non-formal education, can facilitate practical understanding. Here, the youth can participate in activities that not only inform them about the resources but also help them grasp their application from a hands-on perspective.

Lastly, the power of unconventional awareness drives cannot be overlooked. Organising events that catch the eye, like flash mobs or other guerilla marketing tactics, not only spreads the word but does so in a manner that resonates with the energetic and dynamic spirit of the youth. Such initiatives serve a dual purpose – they inform and inspire, ensuring that the rural youth is always a step ahead, ready and equipped for strategic action.

## EXPECTED OUTCOMES OF THE EUROPEAN YOUTH VILLAGE AND FUNCTIONAL ECOSYSTEM

Determining the effectiveness and youth-centric nature of the European Youth Village program requires careful observation of various indicators within the youth ecosystem. It's understood that across different countries within the European Union, there are localized efforts, akin to this program, aimed at invigorating youth activity and fostering a sense of pride in their origins. Such efforts sometimes even include comprehensive marketing strategies to effectively promote these initiatives.

One robust indicator of a youth-centric approach is an uptick in youth participation, both in terms of numbers and quality of involvement. An increased rate of youth collaborating with their peers, engaging with stakeholders, and committing to longer-term volunteering roles would point towards an environment where youth feel empowered and crucial to the community's fabric.

Furthermore, forging partnerships with neighboring villages can exponentially boost the program's impact. If a village is actively participating and reaping benefits, why not facilitate exchanges and collaboration with adjacent villages? This mutual growth and exchange of ideas can lead to a holistic development approach across larger regions.

Another telling indicator would be the demographic shifts in rural areas. If families, especially those with younger members, start migrating back to villages, it's a sign of the village's enhanced appeal. Various factors can be assessed here: average age in the area, duration of their stay in urban centers, their education level, and even insights about family members living abroad. The program should delve into these details, understanding and thereby creating a holistic environment that offers not just infrastructural amenities like good schools but also fosters a warm, welcoming community. Often, families gravitate towards cities seeking better amenities but find the sense of community in villages more fulfilling. However, the economic feasibility of sustaining rural life, especially with responsibilities like animal care, can't be ignored.

A more qualitative measure would be gauging happiness and satisfaction levels year-on-year. By employing diverse instruments and asking varied questions, one can trace emotional and mental well-being trajectories over time. Paired with need-discovery processes, such insights can ensure that the program remains adaptive and responsive to evolving youth needs. For instance, if transportation emerges as a recurring concern, resources can be redirected to address this specific issue.

It's essential to remain cognizant of the fact that each country, and even regions within countries, might interpret certain general concepts differently. What constitutes a village, its merits, and its drawbacks, and the reasons for urban migration can differ based on cultural, economic, and social nuances.

In certain countries, the importance of youth participation and rural revitalization is so pronounced that significant funds are allocated to programs like these. These initiatives can

dramatically shift perceptions about villages and their potential. On pondering the direct benefits to states, the outcomes seem multifold. Youth become happier, more engaged, unemployment rates decrease, and there's a potential for monetary inflow into the villages.

To summarize, the success of the European Youth Village program is multi-dimensional. It's about numbers, yes, but it's also about qualitative changes in life experiences, aspirations, and the very essence of rural communities.

## Annex 2 - The answers to the Survey for Optimizing and Scaling the European Youth Village Program, from Romania to a European Level

### About the program

#### 1. What priorities do you consider essential for the European Youth Village program at European level? (Max. 3 options)

- Encouraging youth engagement in civic life: 23 respondents (60,5%)
- Creating opportunities for the young people from rural areas in their villages: 21 respondents (55,3%)
- Improving access to education and vocational training: 17 respondents (44,7%)
- Sustainable development of rural communities: 15 respondents (39,5%)
- Supporting innovation and entrepreneurship among youth: 12 respondents (31,6%)
- Developing youth friendly villages: 11 respondents (28,9%)
- Encouraging inter-community and international cooperation: 10 respondents (26,3%)
- Strengthening the policy framework at all levels: 2 respondents (5,3%)

#### 2. What should be the guiding lines of the EYV program at a European level? (Max. 3 options)

- Encouraging active youth participation in community life: 27 respondents (71,1%)
- Focus on the personal, professional and social development of youth: 22 respondents (57,9%)
- Promoting a flexible program that addresses local needs: 21 respondents (55,3%)
- Emphasis on mental health and well-being of youth: 10 respondents (26,3%)
- Encouraging diversity and inclusion: 8 respondents (21,1%)
- Encouraging partnerships with the private sector and NGOs: 8 respondents (21,1%)
- Encouraging ecological and sustainability initiatives: 8 respondents (21,1%)
- Promoting gender equality and diversity: 4 respondents (10,5%)

#### 3. What do you think should be the targeted impact of the European Youth Village (EYV) program at a European level? (Max. 3 options)

- Increased rural youth participation in local, national, and European political decisions: 24 respondents (63,2%)
- Increased civic engagement and youth participation in community life: 15 respondents (39,5%)
- Existing functioning partnerships between rural communities, local authorities, informal groups of young people and NGOs, to address common challenges: 15 respondents (39,5%)
- Improved quality of life for rural youth through educational and vocational programs: 12 respondents (31,6%)
- Existing functioning network of rural communities from different European countries focused on the exchange of best practices and cooperation: 10 respondents (26,3%)
- Better strategies to approach the challenges faced by rural youth: 8 respondents (21,1%)
- Increased diversity and inclusion practices in rural communities, through involving all social groups in community development: 8 respondents (21,1%)

- Established sustainable development models that are in place and can be replicated in rural communities across Europe: 9 respondents (23,7%)
- Increased sustainable development and ecological practices in rural communities: 6 respondents (15,8%)

#### 4. What benefits for young people at the local level do you foresee by implementing such a program in your country? (Max. 3 options)

- Increasing community cohesion: 20 respondents (52,6%)
- Training and education for youth: 18 respondents (47,4%)
- Strengthening local participatory governance: 11 respondents (28,9%)
- Youth autonomy: 11 respondents (28,9%)
- Youth wellbeing: 10 respondents (26,3%)
- Protecting and capitalizing on cultural and natural heritage: 8 respondents (21,1%)
- Job creation in the youth sector: 9 respondents (23,7%)
- Encouraging entrepreneurship: 9 respondents (23,7%)
- Fostering innovation and creativity: 9 respondents (23,7%)
- Stimulating the local economy: 5 respondents (13,2%)

When asked about the most pressing priorities, the majority (60.5%) stressed the importance of galvanizing youth engagement in civic activities. The survey also emphasized the need to create opportunities for youth from rural zones, with 55.3% of respondents voicing this concern. Moreover, enhancing the availability of education and vocational training was highlighted by 44.7%.

Furthermore, when considering the guiding lines of the EYV at a European scale, a substantial 71.1% emphasized the urgency of stimulating youth participation in community activities. A total of 57.9% of the respondents identified the importance of focusing on the personal, professional, and social development of youth. Meanwhile, the sentiment to promote a flexible program addressing local needs was also conspicuous, standing at 55.3%.

Regarding the envisioned impact, 63.2% hope for a spike in rural youth participation in decision-making on local, national, and European fronts. Equally notable, 39.5% foresee improved civic engagement, and another 39.5% anticipate the creation of operational partnerships between various stakeholders such as rural communities, local authorities, and NGOs.

Lastly, on the topic of local benefits for the youth, community cohesion surfaced as a major theme (52.6%). Training and education stood at 47.4%, pointing towards the urgency of skill enhancement and learning. Strengthening local participatory governance and promoting youth autonomy both garnered 28.9% support.

**CONCLUSION:** The program's core strength lies in its perceived ability to amplify youth engagement in civic activities. There is a palpable demand for more proactive roles for young individuals, especially in rural areas. This presents an opportunity to bolster community-based initiatives, emphasizing inclusivity and tailored interventions to address local needs.

While there are clear positive aspects, it's equally vital to recognize the challenges. Despite the significant emphasis on youth engagement, the lesser focus on sustainable development of rural communities (39.5%) suggests a potential oversight. This could lead to short-term gains without sustainable growth in the long run.

Another intriguing point is the emphasis on creating a program that is adaptive to local

needs. While flexibility is paramount, it might make the program's scalability across Europe challenging. Balancing between flexibility and a standardized framework for scalability remains crucial.

## Preparing the application for obtaining the title

### 5. What benefits would you expect from such a title for your community? (Max. 3 options)

- Increasing visibility at national and international levels: 24 respondents (63,2%)
- Attracting funding and investments: 18 respondents (47,4%)
- Strengthening community identity: 18 respondents (47,4%)
- Youth infrastructure development: 18 respondents (47,4%)
- Improving quality of life: 16 respondents (42,1%)
- Access to networks and partnerships: 11 respondents (28,9%)
- Tourism development: 3 respondents (7,9%)

### 6. What step do you consider the most important for preparing the community for title development (before the application)? (Max. 3 options)

- Data collection and research on youth needs: 25 respondents (65,8%)
- Conducting workshops and public consultations: 21 respondents (55,3%)
- Identification and involvement of key stakeholders: 18 respondents (47,4%)
- Designation of a local initiative committee: 14 respondents (36,8%)
- Drafting a preliminary plan: 14 respondents (36,8%)
- Creating solid documentation for the application: 7 respondents (18,4%)

### 7. Which stakeholders do you consider essential for application development and program implementation? (Max. 3 options)

- Youth NGOs and associations: 31 respondents (81,6%)
- Local and county administration: 27 respondents (71,1%)
- International partners and European organizations: 17 respondents (44,7%)
- Educational institutions: 14 respondents (36,8%)
- Local organizations and businesses: 12 respondents (31,6%)
- Representatives of minority communities: 8 respondents (21,1%)
- Others: 1 respondent

### 8. What priority directions of activities and projects should be for the community that obtains the title? (Max. 3 options)

- Education and vocational training: 22 respondents (57,9%)
- Civic participation and democracy / Civic engagement and leadership: 22 (57,9%)
- Health and well-being: 14 respondents (36,8%)
- Innovation and entrepreneurship / Local economic development: 16 respondents (41,1%)
- Culture and arts: 12 respondents (31,6%)
- Ecology and sustainable development / Environment and sustainability: 10 respondents (26,3%)
- Leisure time activities for young people: 11 (28,9%)

**9. How do you see the application and evaluation process for the title? (Max. 2 options)**

- Participatory, with consultations and public votes: 22 respondents (57,9%)
- Simple, with minimal bureaucracy: 18 respondents (47,4%)
- Detailed, with multiple evaluation stages: 12 respondents (31,6%)
- Competitive, with multiple selection rounds and the involvement of an independent jury of experts: 7 respondents (18,4%)
- Expedited, with quick decisions: 5 respondents (13,2%)

**10. What is the ideal time period between granting the title and the implementation year?**

- 1-2 years: 15 respondents (39,5%)
- 6-12 months: 13 respondents (34,2%)
- 3-6 months: 5 respondents (13,2%)
- 2-3 years: 2 respondents (5,3%)
- 3-5 years: 2 respondents (5,3%)
- 5 years or more: 0 respondents

The title of being a part of the European Youth Village brings a plethora of benefits, as identified by respondents. A significant 63.2% of participants believe this title would amplify their community's visibility on both national and international fronts. Furthermore, 47.4% anticipate an influx of funding and investments, and another 47.4% expect it to reinforce community identity.

The preparatory phase for obtaining the title appears intricate, with 65.8% emphasizing the need for in-depth data collection and research concerning youth requirements. Additionally, workshops and public consultations are deemed essential by 55.3% of the respondents.

When pondering over the quintessential stakeholders for the application process and subsequent implementation, Youth NGOs and associations stood out, receiving backing from 81.6% of the participants. Local and county administrations were also underscored by 71.1%.

As for the priority areas of activities, education and vocational training along with civic participation and democracy both secured support from 57.9% of respondents. Interestingly, the application and evaluation process for the title is seen by the majority (57.9%) as something that should be participatory, entailing consultations and public votes. 47.4% also emphasize the importance of simplicity with minimal bureaucracy.

Regarding the ideal gap between title acquisition and the execution year, opinions varied, with the most popular option being 1-2 years (39.5%), followed closely by 6-12 months (34.2%).

**CONCLUSION:** The prospect of obtaining the EYV title is seen as a significant opportunity for communities to elevate their stature and receive the necessary support. The heightened visibility and potential funding sources can drastically change a community's trajectory. However, while the allure of increased visibility is compelling, the onus will be on the communities to translate this visibility into tangible benefits.

Data-driven decisions are at the core of this initiative. The stress on researching youth needs before application emphasizes a bottom-up approach. However, the potential pitfall lies in ensuring that data collection is both comprehensive and actionable. The overwhelming support for Youth NGOs and associations indicates a trust in grassroots organizations over top-down approaches. This could be both an advantage, due to their on-ground knowledge,



and a challenge, owing to resource constraints these organizations often face.

Finally, the application and evaluation process's desired flexibility and inclusivity, though commendable, can make standardizing the process across Europe challenging. Balancing inclusivity with efficiency is paramount.

## Relationship with program governance

### 11. How extensive should the program governance involvement be in the application, implementation, and evaluation processes?

- Moderate, with guidance and support: 19 respondents (50%)
- Collaborative, sharing responsibilities with the community: 10 respondents (26,3%)
- Significant, with an active role in decisions: 5 respondents (13,2%)
- Complete, from start to finish: 2 respondents (5,3%)
- Minimal, letting the community decide: 1 respondent (2,6%)
- Major, controlling most aspects: 0 respondents

### 12. What level of mentorship is required from the governance for the management team of the application? (Max. 2 options)

- Mentorship tailored to the needs of the team: 21 respondents (55,3%)
- Seminars and workshops: 18 respondents (47,4%)
- Regular mentorship: 9 respondents (23,7%)
- Continuous mentorship throughout the program: 8 respondents (21,1%)
- Occasional mentorship: 5 respondents (13,2%)
- No mentorship: 1 respondents (2,6%)
- Intensive guidance: 1 respondents (2,6%)

### 13. How do you assess the opportunity to collaborate and connect with other European Youth Villages in other countries?

- Highly advantageous: 25 respondents (65,8%)
- Advantageous, but with reservations: 10 respondents (26,3%)
- Neutral: 3 respondents (7,9%)
- Disadvantageous, but with possible benefits: 0 respondents
- Highly disadvantageous: 0 respondents
- Don't know/ Won't answer: 0 respondents

### 14. Being more specific, how do you see the possibility of connecting and cooperating with other European Youth Villages in other countries?

- Excellent opportunity for the exchange of best practices: 25 respondents (65,8%)
- Opportunity for joint development and funding: 9 respondents (23,7%)
- Complicated due to cultural and legislative differences: 3 respondents (7,9%)
- Priority for program success: 1 respondents (2,6%)
- Risk of diluting local identity: 0 respondents
- Necessary but not urgent: 0 respondents

The governance of the European Youth Village program is pivotal to its success. Its involvement level and approach can shape the program's effectiveness, especially as

communities across Europe adapt and customize the program based on their unique requirements.

When considering the extent of governance involvement, the majority of the respondents (50%) felt it should be *moderate, with guidance and support*. The next significant cohort (26.3%) preferred a *collaborative approach, sharing responsibilities with the community*. Only a minority saw governance taking on an extensively active role or handling everything from start to finish.

Mentorship is a valuable resource for the community and the management teams involved. The survey indicates that a *mentorship tailored to the needs of the team* was the most favored option (55.3%), followed by the provision of *seminars and workshops* (47.4%).

Regarding collaborations and connections with other European Youth Villages, an overwhelming 65.8% found it to be *highly advantageous*. Diving deeper into this sentiment, these respondents regarded it as an *excellent opportunity for the exchange of best practices*. However, some (23.7%) saw it as an *opportunity for joint development and funding*, while a small percentage (7.9%) found the idea complicated due to potential cultural and legislative differences.

**CONCLUSION:** The governance aspect of any program can be a double-edged sword. Too much intervention might stifle community-driven initiatives, while too little might leave communities without a guiding structure. The survey reveals a balanced sentiment: communities want autonomy but also value guidance. The overarching sentiment is a desire for a supportive, not suppressive, governance structure.

Mentorship is clearly seen as a crucial support mechanism, especially when it's tailored to the unique needs of individual communities. This bespoke approach ensures that communities get the right guidance at the right time.

Cross-community collaborations are generally viewed positively, but there's a hint of caution. While the exchange of best practices is embraced, there's an acknowledgment of potential challenges when bridging cultural and legislative differences.

## Ambassadors of the program

### 15. Would you recommend such a program to other communities in Europe?

- Highly recommend: 29 respondents (76,3%)
- Recommend with reservations: 7 respondents (18,4%)
- Don't know/ Won't answer: 2 respondents (5,3%)
- Neutral: 0 respondents
- Not recommend with reservations: 0 respondents
- Do not recommend: 0 respondents

### 16. If yes, would you be interested in becoming part of the corps of the program ambassadors?

- Very interested: 15 respondents (39,5%)
- Interested: 11 respondents (28,9%)
- Don't know/ Won't answer: 5 respondents (13,2%)
- Slightly interested: 4 respondents (10,5%)
- Neutral: 3 respondents (7,9%)

- Not interested at all: 0 respondents

Ambassadors play a pivotal role in promoting and representing the program across different regions.

The survey suggests strong support for the program. A significant 76.3% of respondents would *highly recommend* it to other European communities. This endorsement speaks volumes about its perceived benefits and potential for impact. When asked if they'd be interested in serving as ambassadors for the program, 39.5% expressed they were *very interested*, while 28.9% showed interest.

**CONCLUSION:** The overwhelmingly positive response to the idea of recommending the program and the willingness to become ambassadors highlights the perceived value of the European Youth Village program. Potential ambassadors can play a dual role: they can champion the program and share insights from their own experiences, while also serving as a feedback loop to the governance, helping refine and adapt the program based on ground realities.

However, the fact that some respondents are interested with reservations or are unsure suggests that there might be some concerns or ambiguities about the ambassador role or the program itself. Addressing these reservations transparently and providing more information could convert these unsure respondents into strong program advocates.

In conclusion, for the program to thrive and achieve its goal of a holistic and community-based development approach at the European level, it's crucial to maintain a balance between governance and community autonomy, facilitate effective mentorship, promote inter-community collaborations, and leverage the potential of program ambassadors.

## Annex 3 - “Scaling the European Youth Village Program” session outline

(8 sept, 12:00-13:00)

After conducting the focus groups on the six themes, the policy proposals and recommendations were analyzed, resulting in the following vision and overall objective:

- The VISION: "We dream of a countryside where every young person can shine! We want you to have all the tools and chances you need, in a world that listens to your voice. Together, let's make rural Europe a cool, caring, and creative space for all!"
- The GENERAL OBJECTIVE: "Our big goal is simple: make every village a place where young people can learn, grow, lead, and be happy!"

Considering the European Youth Village program could become a significant tool for the development of the Rural Youth Ecosystem, and being concerned about initiating a participatory process to scale it from the national level (as it was implemented in Romania) to the European level, we decided to organise 3 focus groups involving only the 43 participants, from countries other than Romania, in shaping the portrait of this program in Europe.

Starting from the newly outlined vision and general objective and adding the Program's mission - “to be a strategic program aiming to develop the rural youth ecosystem”, the participants shared their views on how the European Youth Village program can effectively develop a sustainable and empowering youth ecosystem in rural areas, fulfilling its specific objectives through strategic tools and partnerships, and what the expected outcomes are for the youth and public authorities involved. The participants were divided into the 3 focus groups, each led by a facilitator and accompanied by an assistant who jotted down the participants' thoughts and conclusions. The first discussion group zeroed in on Specific Objectives and Strategic Tools, the second on Participation and Awareness, and the third on Expected Outcomes and a Functional Ecosystem. For each group, over the span of an hour, the facilitator steered the conversation, aided by two focus points. Subsequently, the participants were presented with a survey, aiming to gather additional insights regarding the scaling of the European Youth Village program. 38 of the 43 participants answered the questions.

The participants were invited to answer this main question:

**"How can the European Youth Village program effectively develop a sustainable and empowering youth ecosystem in rural areas, fulfilling its specific objectives through strategic tools and partnerships, and what are the expected outcomes for the youth and public authorities involved?"**

Focus Points:

### 1. Specific Objectives and Strategic Tools:

- How can the program develop best practices in the field of youth and offer a positive model of community organizing, development and building, that can be scaled at European levels?
- What tools, such as Community Organizing, Participatory Rural Planning (including Advocacy), Education, and Public-Private Partnerships, will be most effective in achieving these specific objectives and how?

### 2. Participation and Awareness:

- What steps can be taken to increase the involvement of youth and public authorities in addressing community needs?
- How can the program make rural youth more aware of the resources available to them and

prepared for strategic action?

3. Expected Outcomes and Functional Ecosystem:

- What are the indicators that would suggest the youth ecosystem is not just functional but also youth-centric, in terms of increased youth and authority participation, heightened awareness of available resources among youth, and a functional youth-centric ecosystem?
- How will these outcomes improve the direct lives of rural youth and how can these be measured?